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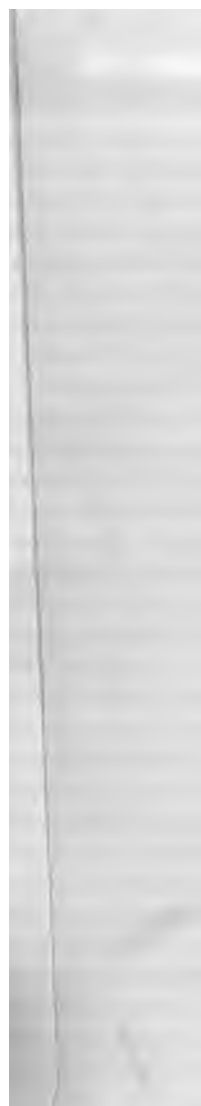
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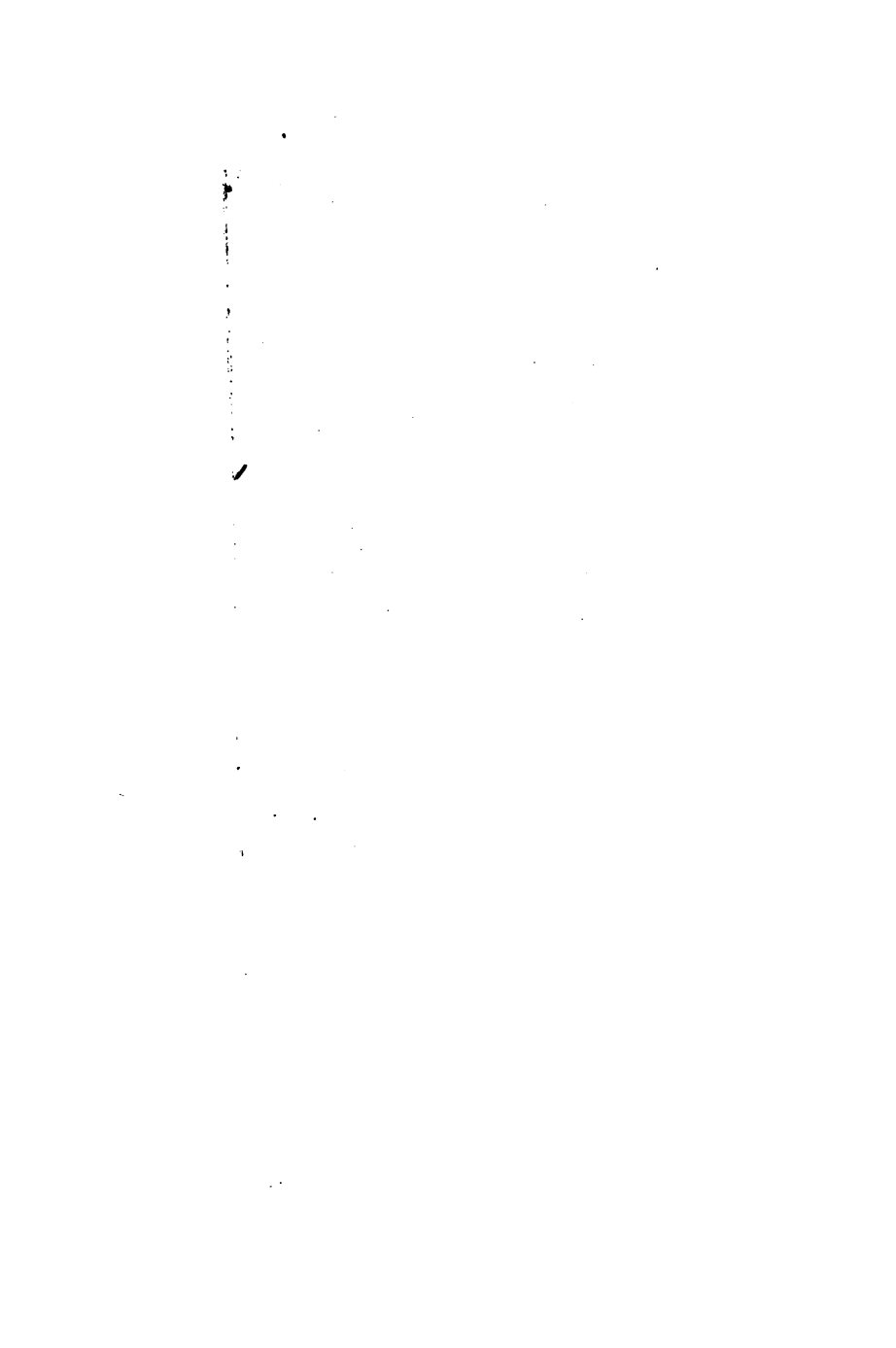
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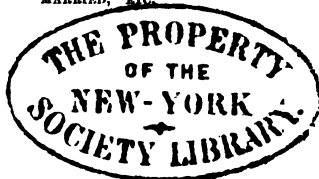
HIS MARRIAGE VOW.

BY

MRS. CAROLINE FAIRFIELD CORBIN,

AUTHOR OF "REBECCA, OR A WOMAN'S SECRET,"

"MARRIED," ETC.



For nature hath this *ultimate* end, . . . namely,
the ascension of the soul into higher forms.

R. W. EMERSON.

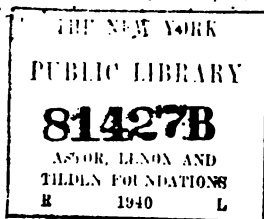
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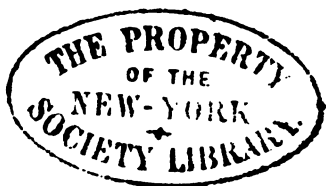


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INTRODUCTORY.

BEFORE the curtain rises, a little music to soothe one's agitations; before the battle opens, the blast of a trumpet to stir one's martial zeal; before the sermon, a prayer. Therefore, at the outset of this story, which is the story of a temptation common enough indeed, yet not, it seems to me, very commonly understood in its deepest causes and bearings, let us indulge ourselves in a few reflections, which may tend, perhaps, to clear up some mists and vapors, and light with a pure and steadfast glow, like that which makes the outer world of nature so transparent, the scene upon which our drama is to be enacted.

Is it in the nature of man to be, for truth's sake, true? Is it in the nature of woman to fall — overborne by temptation — into the snare which passion sets, and yet by any means emerge from it with in-

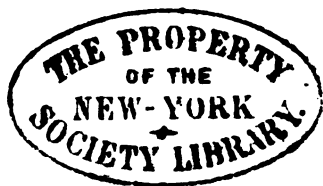
ward purity intact? Is it in the nature of love to renounce an unlawful gratification instead of claiming it; to prefer the higher graces of purity and the possession of one's self in peace and honor to the lower delights with which passion lures the senses? Are these ideal possibilities of virtue only to be dreamed of in connection with the millennium, or are there powers inherent in human nature, by means of which such contradictions may be reconciled, such battles fought and victories won?

Again, the old and oft-recurring question concerning the uses of transgression. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," prayed the Christ; yet it was the crowning achievement of the Christ-life that he was tempted in all points, like we are, yet without sin. How shall we be known, how shall we know ourselves, unless we are tried? Yet is there not a higher atmosphere which the soul aspires, and which it may reach in this life, where temptation is vanquished, not in detail, by petty fights, but by a grand and truthful, which resolutely bears the soul above the level of evil desires, and leaves them far raging vainly for their prey?

Yet one other paradox, more troublesome, perhaps, than these, — practically, harder than all others, one thinks, when one consults the history of the race, for the human heart to solve; namely, the prerogatives and the limitations of love. The cry of the human heart for love is as instinctive as the cry of the flower for sunshine; its right to it as inalienable; but to distinguish between love pure and simple, and that base alloy or counterfeit of love, which is, when keenly analyzed, nine parts in ten mere selfishness, seems to be a power which comes never by nature, but only by grace. When love *gives* it is pure; when it craves it is alloyed. Pure love is pure beneficence, and knows no limitation; but selfishness must ever feel the restraint of law. The compensation is, that in giving all and seeking nothing in return, the soul enters into a higher and more intimate possession of its object than is possible to the senses. So, always, self-renunciation is the true gain, and it is this uttermost love, this love which blossoms out of the denial of self, the resistance of evil, which is the essence of true religion. It is upon this higher plane that the soul realizes, not only that God is love, but also that Love is God. It is in this divine atmosphere

that the true Christianity unfolds itself to the soul perceptions, and love — towards God and man — shine clear and luminous, the open secret of all nature, the living, throbbing soul of universal being.

For the rest, the springs of all philosophy lie hidden in practical life, and the novelist who seeks them there, is but dipping his cup at the fountain head instead of slaking his thirst at the troubled stream or with the more convenient, but less genuine, water of artificial reservoirs.



HIS MARRIAGE VOW.

CHAPTER I.

THE day was over, and, as Lucia Denney seated herself in the low rocking-chair by her chamber window, she was obliged to confess that it had not been altogether an unpleasant one. To be sure, the unpacking of trunks and the settling of drawers and closets, is not, in itself, a delightful occupation; but she had felt all day the influence of a quiet though cordial welcome, and there had been here and there incidents and inquiries which had cleared up a great deal that before was dim about her new home, and given her, on the whole, a favorable impression of it. It would be a good place for her boy, her little Chester, — she could see that at a glance, — for there was a large door-yard, tenanted at will by a dog and cat and innumerable chickens; and meadows, and orchards all about, with a pebbly brook, which rushed and frolicked along for a while in an ungovernable fashion; and then, just under the hill, spread out into a fine and smooth pond, which, if it was not very large, was always clear, and harbored nothing more dangerous than minnows and turtles. Lucia had very vivid remembrances of her own happy

out-door child-life, and cherished a profound conviction that there is no better playmate for an active boy than a stream of live, pure water.

Lucia had had a little sober dread of this coming home to live with her dead husband's mother, which, indeed, was not yet wholly dissipated. Her life had been a curiously checkered one. Born in a remote country town, and left an orphan in the very dawn of her womanhood, her brave heart had forbidden her to sink into the state of dependency which seemed inevitable. Poor though she were, her breeding had been of the best, if one counts as good a training which brings out in sharp relief all the fine, strong points of a fresh and simple nature, and sets them in the cool north light of an invincible courage and candor. Her creed was short, and had no room for shams. Her manners were courteous and direct, and went through all shallow conventionalisms as a housemaid's broom goes through a cobweb, leaving the place tidier and cleaner. She was not a beauty, but there was a ripple in her brown hair, a smiling curve about her chin, a glint in her eye, and all sorts of magic accents in her voice, which served her well enough instead of beauty, and still left her atmosphere unperturbed by any cloud or mist of vanity.

One legacy she had from her father, which he highly prized, — this sentence to wit: "Remember, child, that the quest of life is to find one's true self. Have spent my last gold piece to buy you this sentiment. Wear it on your heart, to keep you in mind of these, my dying words."

It was an antique cameo, a head of Psyche in onyx, and set as a medallion,

This was all her wealth, when, at the age of sixteen, she went to the great city. She found employment, first as a sempstress, afterwards as a type-setter. Cecil Denney was a journalist — a nature deep, and still, and true. He was well descended; the name had been Saint Denis once, and an ancestor of his had founded a Huguenot settlement in the wilds of the new world; but the New England Puritans of the seventeenth century had made short work of the "Saint," and the next hundred years corrupted the orthography of the rest. He was proud, as became his race; but his pride was still the pride of character, and he wooed and won the woman he loved, caring nothing that she was poor and a worker, but everything that she was fine and genuine of soul.

Not so his mother. She was not a Saint Denis, it is true, but she was proud to bear the name, and this only son of hers was still a plumed and crested knight to her fancy, and the peer of any lady in the land. So there was a rupture, and outwardly a coldness, where there should have been, nay, really was at heart, the warmest, truest love; and when Cecil died, Lucia had never seen her mother-in-law. They met at the funeral, and Mrs. Denney did not find in her daughter-in-law the woman whom her imagination had painted. It had been in her heart to offer to take her grandson, little Chester, home with her, and bring him up; but she saw in Lucia's eyes that this was not a feasible plan.

"Have you anything left — any resources, I mean?" she asked of her when the formal funeral dinner was over.

Lucia's lip quivered, but she spoke calmly, —

"A few hundred dollars per year from life insurance," she said, "and my brain and hands."

Mrs. Denney pondered for a moment, and said no more. There could be no common ground between them as yet. So Mrs. Denney returned to her home, and Lucia went on with her life. During her married years she had been too quietly happy to think much of work beyond the loving labor of her home. Yet now and then, inspired by Cecil, she had written a song, or a sketch, or a book notice, which had brought her in a bank-note. She had no real gift in that direction, and she knew well enough that to try to earn her living in this way would be a wearisome task; but it seemed the best she could do, and she meant to do her duty faithfully; and so, for three years, she did.

In all this happy, or this busy life, she had pondered seriously, at times, concerning her father's injunction, "To find one's soul." What did the phrase mean? She remembered too well her father's tossed and harassed outward life, and the grand and tranquil atmosphere in which he really lived, not to feel certain that it had a meaning and a deep one. But had she ever realized that deep meaning in her own life? It seemed to her candid mind that she was fully as thoughtful, as charitable, as sincere, as the average women of her time; she tried to live true to such inner light as came to her; she had some secret aspirations towards spiritual attainments which she breathed to no one. But on the whole, studying the question by the light that shone in her father's dying eyes, had she found her soul? She thought not, chiefly upon this negative testimony: whoever had *found his soul* would surely *know* it, and she had no

such consciousness. But still she labored and loved, and now and then, when something within her grew hungry for God, she prayed.

Her mother-in-law sent her a letter sometimes, and at Christmas always a handsome present for Chester; and this lightened her lot somewhat. But at the end of the third year of her widowhood, life was getting hard and threadbare to Lucia. Just then came this letter from Mrs. Denney:—

“It is now two years since Cecil died. I begin very much to feel my loneliness, and to yearn for the society of my little grandson. I know that your resources are not so great as you might reasonably desire, and I have thought that possibly you might be willing to come and live with me, bearing the restraint which an old woman must always be, in some measure, to a younger one in her own family, for the sake of a quiet home and such benefit as Chester might derive from the healthy neighborhood. I shall, indeed, expect to make some sacrifice of habits and inclinations, and if you are willing to do the same, I think we can get along well enough together, and possibly be of mutual assistance.”

In a later letter, after Lucia had replied favorably to this proposition, had been these words:—

“In one thing I trust you will oblige me. You know my feelings in regard to the long wearing of mourning, especially what are called widow’s weeds. I never wore them myself, and as three years have elapsed since Cecil’s death, perhaps you will not think it unreasonable if I suggest that it would be far more agreeable to me if you would lay them aside.”

Lucia was at first inclined to resent this interference

in what seemed to be a purely personal matter; but her good sense prevailed, and before coming to Ashland she had folded and laid away all her mourning, and appeared before her mother-in-law in a dress of plain gray, relieved only by a trifle of color in her ribbons to match the varying hue of her cheek. This bright, vivacious woman of eight-and-twenty, fond of beauty, fond of admiration, with a natural attraction for all gay flowers and bright coloring whatsoever, with both a warm heart and a stout conscience in her bosom, foresaw, or thought she did, some little cloud of possible annoyance hanging over this same subject.

"I was used to my weeds," she said to herself, "and would have been satisfied to wear them for dear Cecil's sake; but these ashen grays and miserable browns in which Mrs. Denney will expect me to appear, they kill me; that is, they kill my colors; and how can one be happy and buoyant when one is conscious of being a fright?"

However, having, as before stated, a stout sense of right and wrong, which included with Lucia a constant belief in the necessity of subduing the ever-obtrusive *I*, she gave way, and took to her ashen grays and miserable browns with becoming grace and humility.

Lucia had felt all day that Mrs. Denney's was one of those households where nobody commands and nobody obeys, but whose silent, unspoken rule is nevertheless both exacting and unremitting. It was a discipline to which she was not used, and she found it irksome. It was, therefore, with a grateful feeling of rest and relief that, after tea, she went to her own room and shut the door, and having tucked little *Chester* snugly away in his bed, sat down at the win-

dow to become acquainted, in a quiet way, with the landscape which was hereafter to be the most familiar outlook of her life.

The day had been one of those mild and watery ones which characterize the opening of a New England spring. The melting snow-drifts, that here and there whitened the landscape, had all day sent up pale wreaths of vapor, which the balmy air absorbing had fed out again to the sere and sodden turf, and the just stirring flower-stems; and the sunbeams, fitfully quivering and dancing over all, had completed the spell which had set the green blades springing in the hollows, and burst open the first buds of the violets, and filled all the tender, rosy dusk with their fragrance.

Mrs. Denney's house was situated on a little eminence, which was of itself a part of one of those broad, smooth hills, upon which the older New England towns were built. To the east it commanded a wide view of fertile and beautiful valley lands, with a tiny river winding through and lighting up the whole scene with bright reflections of the blue above. Beyond, the hills rose again gray and wooded against the delicately tinted sky — sufficient barriers, one could but think, against the strife and tumult of the outer world; and the blue dome, hanging tenderly over and consecrating all, breathed a benison upon the scene, and stirred in Lucia's heart a memory of how

“God's greatness flows around our incompleteness,
Round our restlessness his rest.”

Lucia had made friends with the out-door world with an eagerness which only those souls which are finely attuned to the harmonies of nature can under-

and she was just coming away from the window when her attention was attracted by the gleam of a light in the window of the brown house opposite.

The same brown house with its quaint half-ancient, half-modern appearance had provoked her curiosity during the day, and she had asked of Mrs. Denney, —

“Mother, what lives in the brown house next us? It has a queer look as if there might be a story about it.”

Mrs. Denney had answered very gravely, “That is the residence of Chester Elms.”

“How odd how very odd it seems,” said Lucia, “to think of that name as belonging to a stranger! It is so, perhaps, for whom my Chester was named.”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Denney. “Chester and Cecil were friends in boyhood. After Chester married and Cecil went to New York they seldom met; but I was glad when our boy was named for Chester.”

Lucia understood that this was saying a great deal for Chester, and as she judged from her mother’s grave and reticent manner that there was still something which remained untold of this chapter of the family history, she pursued the subject a little.

“Mr. Elms is, then, a favorite of yours,” she said. “Has he children, and did he name one for Cecil?”

“He has no children,” said Mrs. Denney, gravely. Then, after a pause, she added, “It will be necessary that you should know the story of Chester Elms’s life, and I may save future annoyance by telling you all at the beginning. Mr. Elms married at twenty-four a very beautiful girl to whom he had been engaged for a year. In a few months before the marriage, be-
ca
valid. An unsuspected spinal

difficulty developed into entire paralysis of the lower limbs, and for six years Chester, in addition to the care of a large business, has given unremitting care and devotion to his invalid wife. He, of course, receives no company, and is seldom to be found in the house of a friend, since he has an almost morbid dislike of gossiping inquiries concerning his wife's health; and yet he is the most buoyant, cheerful, kind-hearted man I know. Yes, I am proud that our boy is named for Chester Elms."

Lucia's quick sympathies were touched.

"How very, very sad it is!" she said. "Can she live long in that state, do you think?"

"She is as likely to live twenty years as you are. Chester is a manufacturer. He owns three large mills, which he personally superintends; yet he has found time, with all his cares, to study medicine, on purpose that he may understand his wife's case; and he actually will allow no physician to go near her, except that the greatest expert in New York comes once a month to inspect the case, and give such advice as is necessary."

"Is she interesting, this wife of his?"

"Exceedingly. She is very beautiful, and as refined and delicate as a flower. Indeed, no woman less tenderly cared for could, in this rude world, preserve the exquisite purity and saintliness which characterize Marion Elms. Yet she has some strong traits. As a girl, I remember her to have been very proud and self-contained, and constant invalidism has not quelled her spirit."

"And yet she never can be in any proper sense his wife. She cannot share his life, entertain his friends,

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"And yet she never can be in any proper sense his wife. She cannot share his life, entertain his friends,

be the mother of his children, satisfy in any other than a purely ideal manner, any of those wants and requirements of the masculine nature for which wives were ordained."

Mrs. Denney was silent.

"What a prince among men he must be!" said Lucia, softly.

Mrs. Denney looked up with almost a flash in her eye, and then, as if thinking better of it, repressed the remark which had evidently sprung to her lips. They had left the subject then, and Lucia had thought no more of it until her attention had been arrested by the gleaming light in the window.

A low granite wall, so completely overrun by wild bittersweet as in the dim light to present quite the appearance of a hedge, ran just under Lucia's window, separating the Denney lawn from its neighbor. The brown house itself was only a few rods distant. It was a simple and plain structure, half hidden with vines. Its rustic veranda and bay window were evidently modern inventions; the remainder of the house was at least a century old. It was from this bay window that the light shone which had attracted Lucia's eye, and now, following the gleam, she could plainly see, through the half-parted curtains of lace, the delicate figure of the invalid lying upon her bed, while her waiting-woman combed out her long golden hair, and winding it in a heavy coil about her head, covered it with a muslin cap. Then, after busying herself about the room for a few minutes, she withdrew.

The face of the invalid seemed fresh and girlish; but there was, even in her gestures, that indefinable something which indicates character; and Lucia, look-

ing off again upon the wide horizon, took up, in thought, the sad problem of these two lives. The woman was smitten of God and afflicted. She must perforce bear her heavy lot with such resignation as she could ; but a proud, strong man, who could voluntarily assume and steadily bear such a burden of pain and sacrifice, must be a man of rare temper and qualities. She busied herself in this idle moment with trying to form some idea of him. Her fancy pictured a tall, sedate, and reserved individual, with tender lines, indeed, about the mouth, and soft gleams in the eyes, but, on the whole, a man apart from his fellows, profound of soul, and something arbitrary in his intercourse with the world. In this way her thoughts ran on till dusk gave place to darkness. The night birds had already begun to whoop from the far-off, silent forest, and the stars gleamed out from the dusky skies. Lucia traced out the familiar constellations — old friends all of them — that had bent over her cradle, and watched her growing womanhood, and sympathized with the struggles of her later years. It was good to meet them here in the new home. She had knelt now, and crossing her arms on the broad window ledge, contemplated mingling her prayers with the rising thanksgiving of the awakening earth. It seemed to her exalted vision that the whole scene wanted but a human voice to break out into fervent praise. Could she not lend it hers, and so, from these broad hill-altars, with the incense-laden wind to whisper responses, and the stars to spread their hands in silent benediction, the service of nature would be complete ?

Filled with these half-ecstatic emotions, it seemed to

her just an accident that her eye was directed to the bay window of the brown house, exactly in time to see the door open and admit to the room a gentleman who could be no other than Chester Elms himself.

It is curious that spiritual exaltation should sometimes render one oblivious to these refined conventionalisms which are born of the soul's most delicate perceptions; but so, I believe, it often is. In a commonplace mood, Lucia would immediately have turned her eye away from this interview; but lifted a little out of herself by enthusiasm, this just scruple did not occur to her. It was not Chester Elms and his wife at whom she was looking; rather, here were two souls, impersonal to her, to whom had been given strange experiences, and whom, therefore, she longed to know.

She saw simply a stalwart dark-haired man; young, evidently, and full of the rich, strong wine of youth; a man whose very atmosphere was one of strength — she thought, as she looked at him, that the old word *proveness* was spoken of men like him — yet supple and suave as he was strong, and tender, too, it would seem, upon occasion; for, going to the bedside, she saw him stoop and kiss the fair invalid, and then, sitting down beside her, take her white hand in his and stroke and caress it with all the delicate fondness of a lover. For a few moments he chatted with her, and then Lucia saw what seemed to her a wonderful sight. This strong man knelt by the bedside, untied the dainty muslin strings which fastened the invalid's cap, unwound the heavy coil of gold-bright hair, and spread it in all its wonderful wealth over the pillow and down upon the counterpane. Then, kneeling still, he laid

his face against it and kissed it; held its shining lengths before his eyes as if feasting them upon the shimmering golden gleam of it; then laid his face down upon it, as upon a pillow, and stroked and caressed it with unutterable fondness. Then, gently as a woman might, he gathered up the dishevelled tresses, wound them into the coil again and covered them with the cap, and stooping once more for his good-night kiss, took up his lamp and departed. Presently she saw it gleam through the closed shutters of the room next to that of the invalid. Then, burying her face in her hands, she realized to herself what it was for this strong heart so to dash and break itself, year after year, upon the very shores of love, and never once to enter in and take possession of the land. And a deeper thrill of sympathy and supplication stirred in profounder depths of her being, a keener shiver of pain than she had ever felt before. She pressed the hidden Psyche to her bosom, and her inarticulate cry went up to God in the soul's primeval language.

CHAPTER II.

"HALLO, Hop-o'-my-Thumb! how is it with you this morning?"

"My name is not Hop-o'-my-Thumb. My name is Chester Elms Denney."

And the young gentleman, having clambered to the top of the bittersweet wall with imminent danger to the fabric itself, and to his own bones as well, now stood upright upon the top thereof, and looked wistfully over into the flower-bed where Mr. Elms was digging with a spade.

At this announcement that gentleman paused at his work, and took a deliberate survey of the intruder, with an expression of countenance which was half surprise and half amusement.

"Why," he said at length, deliberately, "that is my name, too, all but the Denney. Who gave you that name?"

"The catechism says, 'my sponsors in baptism.' But I believe that my papa, who is dead, gave it to me, because it was the name of an old friend of his."

Mr. Elms smiled outright this time.

"So," he said to himself, "well brought up, but sceptical." Then aloud to the boy, "That old friend must have been myself; so you are my namesake. What can I do for you this morning?"

"First place," said the boy, "don't you call me Hop-o'-my-Thumb any more."

Mr. Elms bowed low, apologized to offended dignity, and promised.

"And then," said the boy, with the frank audacity of childhood, "I want a root of your June pinks for my mamma. To-morrow will be her birthday. I can't find anything at the store that is nice enough for her; but I heard her say the other day that she did wish she had some of those beautiful June pinks. And as you had so many, and as I knew you weren't a stingy chap, like some of them, I thought I'd ask you for a few."

Mr. Elms hesitated for a moment; at length he said,— "You shall certainly have your pinks, my lad. This evening will do, I presume."

"But why not now? You have only to put your spade under that root yonder, and give it a hoist, so, with your foot, and the thing is done."

"Truly; but then these happen to be Mrs. Elms's pinks, and I should prefer to give you some of my own in the garden below."

"Who is Mrs. Elms?"

"She is my wife."

"Humph! have you got a boy?"

"No," said Mr. Elms, dryly.

"Well, why don't you have? If I was a big man, and had a house of my own, I'd have it full of boys, and have a good time."

Mr. Elms smiled in spite of himself.

"What, no girls?" he asked.

"O, girls ain't of much account! They can't fly kites and play ball. Now, you see, if you had a boy, he'd be sure to be a jolly fellow that I could play with."

There ain't a boy in this neighborhood of my age but Jack Gerry, and he ain't worth anything. We played marbles yesterday, and I won every marble he had, alleys and all, in ten minutes; and then, you see, we couldn't play any more. And he whimpered, too!"

"Why didn't you give him back his marbles, and begin over again?"

"O, that ain't the way to play! That's the way girls play. I guess I should, though," he added thoughtfully, "if he hadn't whimpered. I'm sorry you haven't got a boy."

"Well, to tell the truth," said Mr. Elms, "so am I."

That candid admission seemed to do him good.

"So you won't give me any of these pinks. Would your wife scold?"

"Mrs. Elms never scolds. And on the whole, I think I will give you the pinks." And he deliberately plunged his spade down into the soft mould, and bringing up a great clump of the tangled roots, put it into the boy's outstretched hands, and gently setting him over the wall, said, —

"Give my compliments to your mamma, and tell her there are plenty of roots in the garden below the house, and that if she is fond of flowers, I shall give myself the pleasure of bringing her a few some day."

"And I'll tell her that these were Mrs. Elms's pinks, and you didn't want to give them to me at first, but you finally concluded that you would."

"No, Chester," said Mr. Elms, "don't you tell her that. See here, my boy: can you keep a secret?"

"Yes; of course I can," said Chester, scornfully.

"Well, then, it is to be a secret between you and me about the pinks."

"Honor bright," said Chester, and ran away towards the house.

Lucia was very fond of gardening. Not merely fond of flowers, but fond of caring for them, of watching their growth, and feeling their gentle lives dependent upon her love. She had her own spade, rake, and hoe, and delighted to use them. But Mrs. Denney was conservative in her ideas. She had never heard of such a thing as a lady handling a shovel or a rake, and she declared that Lucia would certainly lose caste, as indeed she thought she ought if she were seen digging in her garden for an hour or two every morning. Lucia did not really want to lose caste; still less did she wish to offend her mother-in-law; but to give up her gardening—that was impossible. Therefore she contrived this compromise.

"I am fond of the early hours," she said; "I will rise at five and put on my garden gloves, and hat, and a linen suit, and work an hour before these refined neighbors of yours, who would be shocked at the sight, are fairly out of their beds."

To this Mrs. Denney reluctantly consented, and from that time forth Lucia consecrated the first fresh hours of the morning to her garden. The two houses, as before stated, stood upon a little eminence, and the ground at the rear was so sloping that it had been terraced, the upper terrace being devoted to flowers, and the lower to the kitchen garden. Between the flower-gardens ran the same vine-covered wall which separated the lawns, it being a fancy of Mr. Elms to prefer native products to exotics, a granite wall overgrown with thrifty bittersweet to a hedge of orange or hawthorn. Just on the dividing line stood a large elm, which, in-

deed, overshadowed the garden rather too much; but elms are privileged, and the little circle of green turf which had been left about its trunk on either side the wall was a charming retreat from the summer sun.

Lucia, looking over the premises on one of the earliest of the warm, spring days, had concluded that here was everything necessary for a flower-garden, except flowers. Mrs. Denney was an old-fashioned woman, and a lilac bush and a few peony roots, with a red damask rose, and a few roots of Burgundy roses, a clump of yellow lilies, and one of tiger ditto, fully satisfied her ideas of a flower-garden. If anybody wanted more, there were plenty of annuals, morning glories and evening beauties, and marigolds — yellow marigolds, and also French — and China asters. But Lucia had wild dreams of violets, and mignonette, and heliotropes, and tea-roses, and verbenas, and all the thousand and one dainty and delicate members of the flowery sisterhood. But how to get them? There was no florist within a dozen miles. Lucia was not well enough acquainted to beg of her friends, and it must be confessed that her longings very nearly partook of the sickly hue of envy as she looked over the wall into her neighbor's thriving garden, and beheld the very plants she craved flourishing in wasteful luxuriance. Some remark reflecting this shadow which brooded over the fair landscape of her mind, had sent Chester off to his namesake to beg for pinks, and Mr. Elms, taking a hint from the want which had been expressed of others which might be suspected to exist in a latent form, bethought himself that of the few civilities which he felt free to offer the mother of his namesake, a little assistance about her garden was certainly the most innocent.

Accordingly one bright May morning, when a glance out of his window had made him aware of a broad garden hat just over the wall, bobbing about in a resolute way as its wearer finished the levelling and raking of her beds, he walked out into his own garden, and approaching the wall, said distinctly, —

“Good morning, Mrs. Denney.”

Lucia was a little startled, for although she had not heard him approaching, she recognized his voice, and felt, with a little thrill of complacent wonderment, that her acquaintance with her singular neighbor was about to commence. Looking up, however, she had only time to bow before Mr. Elms continued, —

“I am rather ashamed of myself that I have not sooner found means to become acquainted with the widow of my old friend. I think I was only dimly aware of my negligence, until the other morning I met your bright little boy, and learned that he was my namesake.”

“Ah! Then it must have been from you that he begged those beautiful pinks,” said Lucia, “though I tried in vain to make him confess it. I owe you a thousand thanks for them.”

“Not at all,” said Mr. Elms, laughing. “But I am guilty of treason, and must pay the penalty. It was to be a secret about the pinks, and I have allowed your penetration to surprise me out of it. I am happy, however, to find that Chester was true.”

“O,” said Lucia, “he has, I am glad to say, a clear sense of honor. I wish his discretion were as noteworthy. But if he has made your acquaintance already, I fear you will find him annoying, and I beg that you will not hesitate to repress him whenever it becomes necessary.”

"Chester and I shall be very good friends," said Mr. Elms, with quiet emphasis; "there is no doubt about that; and meantime, is there anything I can do for you about your gardening?"

Lucia looked up with a frank smile, which Mr. Elms playfully thought went far towards accounting for Chester's audacity, and replied, —

"I am in despair. See what fine beds I have made. I did not dare actually move the old peony roots, but I've worked around them the best I could, and set out, as you see, my June pinks; and now, if I could get a few verbenas, and a root or two of something less prim than these monkshoods and campanulas, I should do very well. There are mignonette and sweet alyssum seeds at the store."

Mr. Elms smiled. "I have plenty of both," he said, "blooming in my bit of a conservatory, and about twenty varieties of verbenas. If you are good at managing slips, I can give you cuttings from all my roses; and there are, besides, heliotropes and fuchsias."

Lucia's eyes were shining. "I fear that would be too much," she said. "I could not think of incurring such an obligation."

"O," he said, simply, "the obligation is on my side. I have always more plants on my hands than I know what to do with, and I am so tender-hearted towards them that I cannot well turn them out to die. If I can beg a corner of your garden, and be certain, besides, of your care for them, behold how fortunate I am!"

"If you put it in that way," replied Lucia, "I shall be half afraid to undertake the responsibility. I am only an amateur florist, and I may very likely blunder in my methods."

"To one who has the genuine love of flowers, as I see you have, knowledge comes by instinct. But I shall be glad to look after you a little, nevertheless, if you will permit me. And now, if you are quite ready, I'll bring out a few roots, and we will set them together. I have an excellent man, a most discreet and dignified Milesian; but I love flowers, and there are some things about my plants which I never permit him to do."

Lucia was of a nature to feel deeply the graciousness of this personal attention to her wants, and the breakfast bell rang twice before she heard it, so absorbed was she in her new companion and the floral acquisitions which he brought her. And when at last she met Mrs. Denney's rather rueful face over the coffee-urn, it was with hair a little rumpled, and a collar pinned slightly awry; but she had the presence of mind to bear the reproof which awaited her without any explanation. When, however, a day or two later, Mrs. Denney walked down into the garden to see what progress Lucia was making, and found how completely that portion of her domain had been revolutionized, Lucia exculpated herself by saying, —

"Mr. Elms gave me the plants, mother. He said he had more than he knew what to do with, and would be glad if we could spare them a little room. I did not think you would object; so I accepted."

"That was quite right," said Mrs. Denney. "There are very few men like Chester Elms, and I am always glad to do him a service."

Lucia found this to be literally true. Mr. Elms kept only one house servant, but a woman who was neither exactly housekeeper, nor nurse, nor companion, but

performed the offices of all three by turns, Janet Larkin, by name, had been in his service since his marriage. Janet's duty was mainly about the person of Mrs. Elms, who could never be left alone for a half hour. Therefore, if Janet wished to make any purchases, or to pay a visit, or even to go of a Sunday morning to communion, — the only church service she ever attended, — some one must take her place. Usually, indeed, Mr. Elms managed to be at home; but on rare occasions Mrs. Denney was sent for, and always accepted the invitation with the dignity of a person who has it in her power to confer a favor on a prince of the blood or some such royal personage. So strong was this atmosphere about her, that Lucia herself, in spite of a certain freakish independence in her nature, which was the foe of all prescription, felt herself almost irresistibly swayed by it. Women, if not always reverent, are usually worshipful, and she was not unfrequently surprised to find herself setting these two people, whose lives were so apart from others of their kind, upon a little pedestal, and swinging her small censer of incense before them. Surprised, because, during her whole life, while she had given sympathy and affection freely enough, she had reserved her reverence for objects purely ideal. It was not therefore mere idle curiosity which made her intensely desirous to know more of the inward lives of Chester Elms and his wife. But everybody seemed to conspire to keep her in ignorance.

Mrs. Denney would never talk about them. Even when, as not unfrequently happened if Mr. Elms were at home, Janet ran over for a half hour's gossip in Mrs. Denney's parlor, she naturally preferred to talk of *anything* rather than of the monotonous incidents of her

daily life. Gradually Lucia learned besides that the reticence which Mr. Elms practised himself had become more or less the habit of all his friends. Chester Elms was perhaps unconsciously impressed with a sense of something profound and holy in his domestic life, and without a word, by mere force of reverent and righteous living, he had compelled all who knew him to bow as he bowed before that secret shrine.

It happened, however, one day, when Mrs. Denney was sent for, that she had a severe headache, and had betaken herself to her room, and Lucia felt certain that it would be wrong to disturb her.

"I'm very sorry," she said to Janet, "for you are not looking well, and I'm sure you ought to get a little rest. Perhaps I might be permitted to go in Mrs. Denney's place."

Janet shook her head.

"Is Mr. Elms at home?" asked Lucia.

"He is just now," said Janet; "but he has to go down to the mills immediately."

"Will you not tell him that I would come most gladly? Perhaps he will trust me."

Janet went off with her message, and soon returned to say, with Mr. Elms's thanks, that Mrs. Denney's offer would be accepted.

"If you would please to put on a white wrapper and your softest slippers," said Janet, "I'm sure you'll do beautifully."

The invalid's room was the largest in the house, bright, airy, cheerful, and exquisite in its appointments. The walls were of pale-blue and gold. The carpet was of equally delicate tints, and the light cane furniture was of fairy-like elegance. Upon the marble mantel,

which was upheld by smiling Cupids, stood rare vases filled with fresh and brilliant flowers; and around the walls hung tiny paintings, all cheerful scenes of outdoor life. Upon the tables were the newest books and magazines, and dainty copies also of the older poets and essayists. Draperies of lace, with lambrequins of pale-blue brocatelle and gilded cornices, shaded the windows, before which were arranged stands of rare exotics and lovely blooming plants from the garden.

Upon a low French bedstead, elaborately carved and gilded, among pillows and coverings of snowy whiteness, the lovely invalid reclined. Scattered about her were bunches of brilliant silks and chenilles, from which she was assorting such colors as she needed for the embroidery which she held in her hand. As Janet brought Lucia to the bedside to introduce her, Mrs. Elms looked up with a quiet glance of well-bred inquiry, the only expression which she ever gave of that feeling inseparable in a healthy mind from the physical dependence of invalidism — the slight wonder whether the new appliance will do as well as the old; will not, in fact prove an utter failure. Apparently she was reassured by Lucia's face.

"Janet," she said, after greeting Lucia kindly, "bring Mrs. Denney a chair."

"I would like you to sit near me a little while," continued; "your face pleases me, and I want to come acquainted with you."

Janet brought the chair with smiling alacrity. It was easy to see from her countenance that things were going better than she had feared.

"What lovely embroidery!" said Lucia. "Are you fond of such work?"

"No," said Mrs. Elms, languidly. "But it serves to pass away time. I *used* to be fond of it," she added; "but I never work at it now except with a definite aim. This is a slipper-case for Mr. Elms. He likes such trifles, and I try to keep him supplied with them."

"Can I assist you about your silks?" asked Lucia.

"Thank you, no. If nobody touches them but myself, they never tangle."

And, indeed, the order of the spheres seemed to animate everything about her.

"Tell me about your own life," she said. "You have lived in New York; you have lost your husband; and now you have come here to this quiet place to reside. Are you happy here? Do you find solace in your circumstances?"

Her manner struck Lucia strangely. Beneath the grave decorum from which she never swerved, there seemed such a keen, eager interest, as if she had never had enough of the story of other people's lives; as if an intense curiosity burned secretly in her heart to know if other people were really happier than she.

"My life here," said Lucia, "is far more agreeable than at first I feared it might be. But, then, I could be happy almost anywhere if my child were well situated; and Chester has never thriven as he has in Ashland."

"Chester," she said, inquiringly. "For whom was he named?"

"My Cecil and Mr. Elms were schoolmates and boyish friends," said Lucia, with a slight rising of color; "and my baby was named for your husband."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Elms, and changed the subject.

Lucia felt that she was not pleased ; felt, also, that this was her way of treating disagreeable topics. She ignored them.

"But do you not miss the more intense life of town?"

"No," said Lucia; "I like the quiet."

Mrs. Elms looked up from her embroidery with a quick glance of scrutiny.

"That may be," she said, "because you are of a quiet disposition."

"No," said Lucia; "I like excitement, but I do not like it always."

"You would have interludes of quiet?"

"Yes," said Lucia.

Mrs. Elms did not speak again for five minutes. Lucia possessed a very magnetic nature. She readily received knowledge by impression. It seemed to her, now, that the real query in Mrs. Elms's mind was concerning her husband; and she longed to say to her how perfectly happy she thought Mr. Elms; how thoroughly satisfied with all his surroundings. But her reverie was interrupted. Mrs. Elms quietly folded her embroidery, and laying it at the bottom of a little inlaid work-box, and gathering all her silks in the most orderly manner into the receptacle, and closing the box with a snap of the lock, she said,—

"I have worked enough for to-day. You will, if you please, put this box in the third drawer of the cabinet yonder, in the right hand corner. Then, if you will bring the hand-bell from the mantel, and place it upon this stand, I will excuse you for a few moments. In the library you will find plenty of books; or, if you pre-

fer flowers, you can easily hear my bell from the conservatory if I need you."

Lucia did all these several things with an almost painful exactness, feeling that the circumstances required it. At the last, however, she chose to step across the library to the conservatory, and there, for nearly half an hour, she revelled in beauty that was a delight to her heart. At the end of that time she heard the sharp tinkle of the call-bell, and hastened back to Mrs. Elms's room.

"I thought," said the invalid, "that I could wait till Janet came back before lying down; but she is gone too long. Can you, do you think, remove these pillows, and take away the reclining chair?"

"I will try," said Lucia.

She was naturally deft, but she was already beginning to apprehend trouble, when Janet's step was heard in the dining-room.

"O!" said Janet, entering the room in haste. "O, Mrs. Denney, you can never do that! Let me arrange the bed."

"Janet," said the helpless woman, with a reproof which would have become a queen, — "Janet, you have been gone too long. Mrs. Denney has been very discreet; but you know there are some things for which I can never depend upon strangers."

She was comfortably arranged at last, and then Lucia took her leave.

CHAPTER III.

Most people who thought at all about Marion Elms's life pitied her deeply on account of its monotony; wondered how she could live at all, so shut in from all the world, each day of her life so like every other, and such intolerable tameness in them all. The truth was, that her life was most really and intensely dramatic. The central figure of it was her husband; the central motive, her strong determination, at all hazards, to absorb and concentrate his whole being in her being, his life in her life. She was a woman of acute perceptions and strong will. Before the great affliction of her life fell upon her, she had been aspiring beyond the wont of women. Suitably bred and trained, she was a woman to have adorned a court. She had the intellectual qualities which go to make a brilliant diplomatist. She would have carried on a political intrigue with the nerve and intrepidity which few men possess; and, withal, she was characterized by a subtle refinement, a cool and steady poise of the moral nature, which would have kept her forever free from the contamination of falsity or vice. But instead of this, instead of even the ordinary career of a brilliant and gifted woman, she lived, from necessity, a life of entire seclusion. Her world was narrowed down to one individual and a lay figure or two; and within these

straitened limits all her strong traits of character, all her fine gifts of mind, were compelled to find scope for action.

Chester Elms was her cousin. She had known him from childhood; had discovered and appreciated the fine and noble traits of his character when he was yet a boy; for he had been slow in developing, while she was precocious. When in her twentieth year, her future had been — so to speak — blotted out, and nothing but a blank surface remained of that fair scroll which once had spread so temptingly before her, she had looked to Chester far more than to God for comfort.

"It will make no difference, Marion," he had said; "you will be my wife all the same."

"I knew it would not," she replied; "I trusted you from the first."

The answer thrilled him to the inmost core of his nature. She looked to him as to the supreme director of her life! Very well; he accepted the trust; he was proud of it. That was the key-note of Chester Elms's character. He had not deeper insight or greater scope of mind than other men, but in all high and noble endowments he was rarely gifted. Like Sir Galahad of old, —

"His strength was as the strength of ten
Because his heart was pure;"

and this union of manly strength with ideal purity added to the fascinations of his presence the last irresistible charm.

For five years these two had lived an ideal life. Engrossed in business out of doors, and in his wife's companionship at home, Chester Elms had never for

an instant acknowledged to himself that his life was not as happy and as satisfying as that of most men. There was not, indeed, an hour of that time when he would not have sacrificed every earthly possession if his wife could have been restored to him the healthy, blooming woman who had won his love. But he reasoned to himself that in all lives were imperfections; all lives fall short, in greater or less measure, of that ideal consummation in which the youthful heart portrays its future; and for a long time his very blamelessness was a shield against the knowledge of how deeply his own power was impaired by the peculiarity of his lot. There were those who prophesied that when the full burden of a man's cares fell upon his shoulders, he would feel the need of the sympathy and support of a true helpmeet. But Chester Elms was strong, and bore the burdens of life more buoyantly than most men. It was only when, with the increasing years, he began to feel the need of children in his home, that the first shadow of a regret began to haunt him, and Marion, who perpetually filled her own wasted cup at the full fountain of his life, drank in with her daily draught a brackish taste which he did not suspect was there.

It was some word of his about adopting a child which first brought the subject to daylight.

"Chester," she said, her beautiful arms about his neck the while, "you want children; then *I* no longer suffice you."

"Marion," he answered, closing his eyes and laying his face beside hers on the pillow, "have I deserve that doubt?"

She did not answer him, except with a caress

there was never another word between them on the subject. But from that moment she experienced an apprehension which, sooner or later, pierces the heart of every woman who loves with passion — the fear lest her empire may be divided. She had always watched and weighed his every word and look with an intensity of eagerness which few women, even the most passionate, ever feel. But from that moment her watchfulness was redoubled.

Until that time, too, Chester's allegiance had been spontaneous and free. He had preserved towards his wife an ideal truthfulness without a thought of reserve. But now he began to guard himself against defection.

"I am her sole inheritance in life," he said; "there is nothing left her besides me. It would be unmanly baseness not to yield her the tribute of my every thought and wish."

But when it comes to that the bond is straining. Yet still the storm was only in the air. There was no actual cloud upon the horizon which either could discern; yet Marion, at least, felt all the while a deadly sense of portent.

There had not been wanting women, who, attracted by all that was noble and fascinating in Mr. Elms, had offered him their friendship; but never one of them had tempted him to turn aside from the strait and narrow path which he had marked out for himself. But Lucia Denney, apart from the fact that she was the mother of his little namesake, attracted him by her very naïve and preoccupied ways. Neglected a little by Ashland society, on account of former prejudices, she gave herself so utterly, and with so sweet nestness, to her boy, her garden, even

mother-in-law, that a nature so loyal as Chester Elms's could hardly help feeling some sympathy with her very fidelity and truthfulness. Most men would, perhaps, have criticised the freedom of her manner; but Chester felt so certain that she was both pure and true, and was, besides, so thoroughly conscious of his own rectitude, that what others might have suspected to be an affectation of innocence, was, to him, simplicity and naturalness itself. And Lucia, who had found the men rare enough who could understand the utter want of artifice in her character, noted this appreciation with silent thanks. She accepted his help as he offered it, simply, frankly, with just a trace of that worshipful spirit which flatters a man's pride, — and that was all. Here, at last, he was tempted to believe he might find a little bit of simple, sweet companionship, which would be inexpressibly refreshing to his withdrawn, and in some sort monotonous life, and he deliberately determined to make the most of it.

He had a deep sense of obligations conferred, and was never quite easy till he had outwardly recognized them. Thus it happened that a morning or two after Lucia's introduction to the invalid's room, as she was watering her plants, the cheerful voice, to which she had now grown well accustomed, called to her over the bittersweet wall, —

“Good morning, Mrs. Denney; come here and thank me for something lovely.”

She looked up with a fresh sparkle in her eye, saying, as she approached the wall, —

“It is not a free gift, it seems, but has to be paid for.”

And then, as she caught sight of a perfect ar-

ing tea-rose, fresh as health, and morning dew, and sunshine could make it, she cried out, —

“Exquisite! Glorious! Is it for me?”

“Yes, for you,” with a little bit of her own sparkle rendered back to her, “when you have paid for it.”

“I wish, indeed, my thanks had any value,” she said. “I cannot say the words, they seem so utterly inadequate.”

“Well, you need not,” he replied. “I have my reward;” and he stood and looked, with a deep and quiet appreciation, at her bright and smiling face, with the healthful current rippling up into her cheek, and the dewy, roseate glow all about her.

“What perfect health you do enjoy!” he said.

Somehow there flashed into her mind at that moment a sense of the contrast between a woman who was always well and a woman who was always ill. She blushed a little, and, feeling the ground slightly dangerous, had recourse to her rose-bush.

“How did you find out,” she said, “that I love roses better than any other flower that grows?”

“O, that was not difficult. When you try, you do not conceal things well. When there is no motive, you are transparent.”

“But I never tried to hide anything from you,” she said.

He did not speak, he simply *looked* dissent. And then she blushed to remember that once, when his eye had fallen with just a shade of disapproval upon a certain gray morning-dress she often wore, she had said, —

“Do not despise my grays and browns. Bright hues are not becoming at a time when one should be clad in black.”

It was strange that this man's silence should be so much more expressive than most people's words. But so it seemed to her.

She went back again to her rose-bush. "I shall take this to my own room," she said. "It will do better there than here."

"Will Mrs. Denney approve?" said Mr. Elms, smiling. "She is always protesting against the plants in Marion's room. She thinks them unfavorable to health. By the way," he went on without waiting for her answer, "I wish there were not two Mrs. Denneys. The name has become, by long use, so thoroughly identified with the character of your lady mother-in-law that to apply it to you seems, in some sense, to obscure your very clear and piquant individuality; also the association confers upon you an unnecessary antiquity. You deserve a name of your own. Is there no other by which you might be called?"

"I suppose," she replied, laughing, "that under some circumstances I might be called Lucia, since that is also my name."

"'Lucia, foe of all that cruel is,'" he said. "It suits you, and I like it. Henceforth may I not call you Mrs. Lucia?"

"Just over this garden wall you may," she said "not elsewhere."

At that moment Chester the Little came running down the walk.

"Good morning, young man," called his namesake "Come here and give me a kiss."

"No," said Chester; "I don't kiss anybody but my mamma, and I shan't kiss you because I don't like you."

"Why not?" said Mr. Elms, with some amusement.

"Because you made me promise to keep a secret, honor bright, and then you blabbed."

Mr. Elms raised his eyebrows. "No," he said, "you are mistaken; at least in part. Your bright mamma guessed it; and you know, being true, I couldn't deny it."

But Chester still held off.

"Come," said Mr. Elms, "I want to be friends with you; and as I may have been a little careless about our secret, I am willing to make peace at some cost. What shall I do for you?"

"When you drive out that gay, fine horse of yours again, will you let me go too? I like horses."

"I'll do better than that. After breakfast I shall drive Lightfoot down to the mills, and am going through all three of them. Would you like to go too, and see the great water-wheel, and learn how it turns the machinery that makes cloth, woollen and cotton cloth—everything you wear?"

"Yes, indeed," said Chester, with sparkling eyes. "And if you really want me to kiss you, I will; but I'm not a baby."

Mr. Elms did really want it, and as the little fellow reached up his face, he lifted him in his arms, and said to Lucia, with a laugh which none but a practised ear would have suspected, sprang out of a deep hurt,—

"I never thought to hold a boy in my arms who was called Chester Elms. Do you know it touches me very deeply that Cecil should have named his boy for me just out of pure and silent love, and never so much as told me of it?"

"Cecil had a silent nature," she answered. "His mother's displeasure was a deep grief to him, and he seldom talked about his old home-life or his Ashland friends. Then he knew, besides, how many interests engrossed you, and thought, I suppose, with that quiet pride of his, that he would intrude neither his boy nor his love upon you."

"All the same I should like to have thanked him. As it is, I think the lad must have a gift for his name. What shall it be, Chester?"

"A horse," said Chester, readily enough; "a horse that I can ride myself."

Lucia exclaimed against this presumption; but Mr. Elms only smiled, and said, —

"Let me see, little boy; how old are you?"

"I shall be seven my next birthday," said Chester, proudly. "Isn't that old enough to have a horse?"

"When will that birthday come?"

"The tenth of August."

"But, Chester dear," exclaimed Lucia, "a horse must have a stable and a man to take care of it."

Chester looked a little nonplussed.

"Tell your mamma," said Mr. Elms, "that you have Aladdin's lamp, and that a stable and a man will come at your call, just as readily as a horse — a pony, that is."

"Why," said Chester, "there would be room enough in your stable — wouldn't there?"

Mr. Elms nodded his head wisely and cheerily at Chester, but said nothing; and Chester, just then, seeing something which he wished to investigate, sprang down, and ran off.

"Let me beg you," said Lucia, "to forget this childish talk. A boy who is strong and healthy like Chester will sometimes be bold in spite of one."

But Mr. Elms only smiled merrily, and made some light remark, which could not well be answered, and bidding her good morning, turned away.

CHAPTER IV.

SPRING deepened into summer, and with the increasing heat Marion Elms experienced perturbations in health unusual to her. She was harassed with frequent and distressing pains; the usual serenity of her temper was disturbed, and those who watched over her found all their devoted care made nugatory by the capricious changes of her malady. Janet was now confined incessantly to the sick room, and Mr. Elms spent whole nights of sleepless watching. When Dr. Spear arrived for his usual visit, he scrutinized the case with more than ordinary interest, and when interrogated by Mr. Elms his replies were guarded.

"There is certainly a general disturbance of the system," he said; "but I see nothing dangerous in it, — nothing, at present, which threatens more than temporary results. Let her mind be kept as tranquil as may be. She has wonderful intellectual force for a physique so slight as hers. We must preclude, as much as possible, all reading and study, — though sometimes undue repression is worse than moderate indulgence, — and avoid all depressing influences. There should be only hopeful, cheerful temperaments about her; and if it is possible without too great fatigue, I should recommend occasional drives. She needs toning and strengthening by all natural means. By pursuing this course there is really nothing to apprehend."

It may be imagined that in this state of his domestic affairs Lucia saw little of her friend. A nod, now and then, upon the street, or a cordial greeting over the garden wall, was about the extent of their intercourse, though Chester, with a child's persistency, managed to get a good many rides behind Lightfoot; and when his mother remonstrated, Mr. Elms always insisted that the company of the child was refreshing to him; that it did him good.

One sultry August morning Lucia rose from unquiet slumbers, and went out into her garden to water her plants. She had but just commenced her task, and was quietly enjoying the clouds of perfume which were wafted back to her in exchange for the plentiful showers which she was dispensing, when Mr. Elms's voice, toned to something less than its usual cheeriness, greeted her over the wall.

"I made sure of finding you here," he said, after she had replied to his salutation, "and I wanted you."

"Ah," she replied, "I hope that is a presage that you intend to make me useful. My obligations to you are becoming so numerous that I shall be glad of an opportunity to repay some of them."

"It is not a little thing that I need this time," he said. "It is a matter so serious that I feel some hesitation about mentioning it; and yet, God help me, I do not know what else to do. Are you, indeed, very much my friend?"

"Mr. Elms," she said, startled by the earnestness of his manner, "I am utterly your friend."

He took her offered hand, and looked into her deep, quiet eyes, and seemed satisfied, grateful.

"It is this: Janet has had some sort of attack in the

night, — I think slight apoplexy, — and must go home for a rest. At this moment I know of nobody whom I can ask to take her place. I shall, however, make diligent search, and meantime —”

He paused, as if to see how his words were affecting her.

She looked up, half hesitatingly, and yet with earnest service offered in her eyes.

“And did you think,” she said, “that I might possibly answer? If you will trust me, I shall gladly do my best. I am very ignorant of the requirements of the sick room, but I can be quiet and watchful, and, like Portia, I am not bred so dull but I can learn.”

“And for Marion’s sake, the sake of a woman who daily suffers martyrdom through all her womanhood, you will take the place of our nearest friend in this emergency?”

“No, Mr. Elms,” very softly, yet almost gayly, “not for Marion’s sake.”

He came out, then, of this constrained, unhappy mood, which seemed so foreign to him, and smiled a right joyous smile.

“What, for *my* sake?”

“Did you not ask me if I were your friend?”

“And your answer implied even this?”

“This and far more, if need be. I should like you to know, once for all, that others besides yourself can cherish a sense of benefits conferred. You have been good to me and to my boy.”

“Leal and true,” he said, “and brave as leal. You cannot tell how light you have made my heart. My poor Marion has not only the nerves of an invalid, she *has the ‘nerves of a marchioness’* as well, and to be left

in her helplessness to the care of an untaught Irish girl, like Norah, would be a torture which I rejoice to be able to spare her. I should never have asked the service of you if I could have seen any alternative, and I promise to use all possible diligence in finding your successor; but I fear it may be some days before I shall be so fortunate. Can you come at once?"

"As soon as I can dispense with this garden costume, and make myself presentable for the sick room."

"Yes, that is right; get on some soft, white thing that will be cool, and won't rustle, and then come directly over. Marion will be infinitely grateful to you, and I—"

"We'll talk about that another time, if you please," said Lucia, smiling, as she tripped away.

With the utmost frankness of speech, there was always in Mr. Elms's manner a delicate reserve, a shy propriety, which hitherto Lucia had admired without fully comprehending; but in the sick room the springs of many of his peculiarities lay open to her view. The couch of his maiden wife was to him as sacred as a shrine; and he never permitted himself to bring into her presence even a thought which was not as pure as the hoar-frost, as chaste as the undefiled snow. And this halo which invested Marion threw its faint and far reflections upon all of woman kind. Every woman was forced, so to speak, to respect her own purity in his presence, since it was certain that he would never wrong it by so much as a thought.

This peculiarity, joined with his evident and grateful determination not to impose upon her a single task which untaught hands might spare her, dissipated half

those perplexities, which, upon a sober second thought, Lucia had rather dolefully anticipated.

The nurse who was needed seemed not to exist, so persistently did she elude Mr. Elms's search; but a well-trained girl, with stout arms and willing feet, was immediately procured, and Lucia's services were then strictly confined to personal attentions to Mrs. Elms. And these duties, onerous in spite of Marion's refinement and consideration, she soon learned to accept kindly, if not to enjoy. In fact, her presence seemed to produce a tranquillizing effect upon Marion's nerves. When Mr. Elms noticed the circumstance, and congratulated her upon it, she said, —

"Yes, I feel that it is so. Janet was old and worn; Mrs. Denney is young, and is in good health. I get strength from her. Besides, she is piquant and fresh, and a charming study to me. Did you not tell me, yesterday, that Janet was improving?"

"Yes; I saw her physician to-day, and he thinks her case far less serious than we at first supposed. She will probably be able to return in a few weeks."

"Ah! then, possibly, we may be able to get on without further change until that time. I do so dread changes!"

Chester bit his lip. Invalidism had developed the least taint of selfishness in Marion's character. Besides that, he fancied that she had never imbibed quite the respect for Lucia which he could have desired.

"I trust," he said, a little reproachfully, "that we shall not need to exact so much of Mrs. Denney. I can see that it is quite a trial to her to be separated from her little boy."

"Ah!" said Marion, and was silent.

Chester was learning sometimes to meet silence with silence, which was, perhaps, the reason that a little incident which transpired next morning did not happen to reach Marion's ears.

Lucia was in the dining-room arranging Mrs. Elms's breakfast upon the tray, when Mr. Elms put his head in at the window, and called her to come out. She heard her Chester laughing, and without a thought in her head of what day it was, went to the door, fully expecting to find the little elf engaged in some new freak of boyish play. What was her surprise, therefore, to see him seated, erect and glowing, upon a fine black pony, which Mr. Elms was patiently leading!

"See, mamma, see! It is my birthday, and I've got my pony."

Lucia's face flushed, and her eyes filled.

"But, Chester, dear," she said, "it cannot be really your own pony."

"Yes, it is, my very, very own. Isn't it, Mr. Elms?"

That gentleman immediately smiled and nodded a happy assent.

"Yes," he said to Lucia, "it is his very own, and it is to be kept in my stable, and Patrick is to teach him to ride. I hope it will prove a beneficial exercise. I think there is not much doubt but he will at least enjoy it."

"I should think not," said Lucia. "But have you told grandmamma, Chester? and what did she say?"

"No," said Mr. Elms, laughing; "we were agreed that it was best to come to you first. We are going to grandmamma next. Don't look dubious. I have *ways and means of propitiating the St. Denis pride*

which you don't dream of. She will look grave at first; but I shall remind her that her Cecil once saved my life, and plead my right to be kind to his boy, and it will all be well."

She looked at him with silent gratitude in her eyes. "He has a royal soul," she said to herself; "it is no wonder that all men and women obey him."

CHAPTER V.

LUCIA had at first spent her nights at home. Indeed, while Mr. Elms was daily expecting that a nurse might be found, this seemed altogether best. But Marion was often in greater distress during the latter part of the night than at any other time; and although Mr. Elms's health was perfect and his spirits most elastic, Lucia soon began to see that he was over-tasking himself, and to feel certain that, if no other resource offered, it would be her duty occasionally to relieve him.

One morning, soon after this observation had occurred to her, upon entering the dining-room, as she came across the garden from home, she found Mr. Elms seated at the table, leaning his head upon his hand, the breakfast still untasted before him.

"Mrs. Elms has had a bad night, I fear," she said.

"Yes," he answered. "I have been up since midnight, and her pains have been torturing. I wrote to Dr. Spear last week, and he thinks we must try changing her position more, — letting her sit up some hours every day if possible. I wish Janet could come back."

Lucia had never seen him so disheartened; but she knew him quite too well to offer formal condolence.

"Yes," she said, "you do need Janet very much. You haven't breakfasted yet — have you? Let me pour your coffee."

She seated herself by the steaming urn, and proceeded to do the honors as if she were quite at home.

He took the coffee from her hand, smiling. Her innocent artifice was beautifully transparent to him, but it was not a whit the less successful for that.

"I've had breakfast," she said, "but I'm blessed with an appetite to which broiled chicken is always tantalizing. I'll trouble you for a piece of the breast."

Mr. Elms was just in the mood to find this kind of badinage delightful. He watched all Lucia's pretty housewifely ways with keen delight, and the aroma of the coffee and the delicate odor of the chicken began to affect his senses altogether differently from what they had done ten minutes ago.

"Why, these muffins are cold," said Lucia; "let us have some warmer ones." And she rang the bell and ordered the exchange.

Mr. Elms said very little; but he sipped his coffee and ate his chicken with a decided relish.

"Well," he said, at length, "this has been a breakfast truly. Half an hour ago I believe I had the dumps; now Richard's himself again. By the way, where is Chester? I am going on horseback to the mills this morning, and he must ride with me on his pony."

"He will be only too happy, I presume. You will, most likely, find him at the stable with Patrick."

Not a change of her husband's mood was lost upon Marion, and Lucia found her more thoughtful on this morning than she had ever known her before. She was resolved not to lose the opportunity.

"Do you think," she said, "that I could take Mr. Elms's place for a night or two? Of course I should *not do as well as he*, but I think he needs rest."

These mornings after distressful nights, were Marion's weakest time. It was then that the fine, firm mettle of her nature wavered most.

"Yes," she said; "I am exhausting him, I fear. O, is it possible, do you suppose, to wear out a man's love in this manner?"

"I would not answer for all men," said Lucia, "but I think one might give bonds for Mr. Elms. Still, he should have respite. I have been thinking of proposing to stay here nights and share his labors. I could give up some hours' sleep every night, I think, without feeling it."

Marion accepted the proposition gladly. "Ah," she said, wearily, "no one knows at what disadvantage I labor. If I only could be cured!"

Lucia was silent, and she went on.

"You think that can never be; but do you know, I am not certain? Pain is evidence of life. I do not believe even Chester has divined Dr. Spear's thought, as I have. Ah, if it could be!"

She covered her face with her hands, and lay for a long time in silent thought.

When Mr. Elms came home at tea time, Lucia took her place at the table, as if it was there that she belonged. When he looked up in a trifle of surprise, she said, simply, —

"Mrs. Elms and I have arranged it all. I am to stay with her to-night, and give you a little rest."

He looked relieved, though rueful.

"You did well," he said, "not to consult me. I don't think I could have consented to it beforehand; but as it is, I can of course be only grateful. Nevertheless, I protest against absorbing you utterly."

"I call that a cool welcome," she said, "and I propose hereafter to take my meals with Mrs. Elms. Her *tête-à-tête* service would answer admirably for two, and I think she would not scorn my company."

Mr. Elms's eyes twinkled. "Why, that would be cruel," he said. "Marion prefers to eat by herself, I know; but your company is almost too delightful to me. I have actually sighed for Janet more at these solitary meals than even during my night watching."

He had finished eating, and sat with arms folded upon the table, watching her as she leisurely sipped her tea and nibbled her cake, innocently prolonging the hour because she felt that he was enjoying it; and he knew that she was so prolonging it, and blessed her for the naïve manner with which she conferred her benefits.

He could be frank, too, if he chose; indeed he was so by nature.

"How is the St. Denis pride affected," he asked, "by your position here?"

Lucia smiled as if to herself, dropping her eyes meantime upon her cup.

"It recoils a trifle," she answered; "not very seriously, however. I think the keenest sting is the fear lest people should begin to believe what has been asserted with such practical emphasis—that Cecil Denney's wife is, after all, not 'to the manner born.' Sometimes," she added, looking up frankly, "I regret that I have not at least a little dignity, but at other times I am glad of it. It saves me a good many unnecessary scruples."

He smiled, but it was only a half-smile. He was himself too proud not to feel a sting in the fact that

any woman who was his friend should pass under the slightest shadow of compromise on his behalf.

"Ah," she said, quickly interpreting his feelings, "you, too, have a regret. If you make me feel that once again, I shall think that I have made a mistake in coming."

"You never shall feel it again," he said; and thenceforth there was perfect confidence between them.

Following Dr. Spear's advice, Marion was allowed to sit up every evening for an hour before her usual time of going to sleep. She looked very lovely amid the cushions of her easy-chair, her soft white *négligé* just defining her slender figure, the faintest roseate hue tinting her delicate cheek, her lovely unbound tresses enveloping her like a golden cloud. She was fond of having her hair brushed. Lucia's touch, too, just suited her; and if she felt quite well she often read aloud for the whole hour, while Lucia brushed her hair, and Mr. Elms sat by her, holding her hand.

"You two form a perfect battery," she was wont to say. "I draw strength from you each moment. I think, indeed, that nothing is necessary to my cure but the true adjustment of magnetic conditions. I know I could be cured if only the proper appliances could be brought to bear. Chester, I shall study up the subject, because I have the necessary leisure. Do you pray for direction."

Chester always smiled sadly at these vagaries, but always gave the required promise. And not unfrequently, when Lucia was watching by Marion's bed, she heard from the next room a voice which could be only the voice of prayer; and always there was an earnestness, a solemn directness and pathos, in the tone, which

filled her with awe. Could God be God and still refuse to grant such prayers?

One cool evening, after a day of quiet and repose, Marion said, as her husband bore her in his arms to her easy-chair, —

“Chester, I feel refreshed this evening, and must talk a little; it will do me good. I have lately had Dr. Max Müller’s books about me, and have read them from time to time as I caught a lucid hour, and they enchant me; especially the manner in which he pierces the mist and shadows of the mythological age, and lets in upon our strained and perplexed vision clear and charming views of that most ancient of all pastoral poems, the life of the Aryan race before the era of dispersion and migration. As in a magic lantern of fabulous power, he carefully arranges his puppets of language, and brings out before one’s vision the most life-like shadows; not only of the outward life of those primeval men and women, but actually making them reflect the inward thoughts and musings of that simple, poetic age. Why, I know of nothing in all history or literature so marvellous and so fascinating. I said he gave us the shadows of those early men and women of whom neither earth nor sea keep record, and whose only monument has come down to us in our language — those common ancestors of Greek and Goth, and Persian and Slave, and Hindu; but he does far more than that. He brings up personalities, and we exchange speech with them in our common tongue. It was not by social convention that a girl-baby was first called *duhîtar*, or milkmaid; the word sprang like a caress out of some fond, happy parent’s heart; and to think that, *after five thousand years*, the women of all the Aryan

racés, of all the civilized and a great portion of the uncivilized world that is, are daughters, milkmaids still! There is an example of the immortality of deeds for you!

“But I did not mean to give you a lecture,” she said, smiling, “upon the pre-historic Aryans, or a eulogy upon Max Müller, but simply to tell you of one keen delight which I have found in his pages. You know how the dawn has always fascinated me; partly because, in my usual health, I am always awake to observe it. Now, Professor Müller traces half the myths of the Indo-European nations back to solar phenomena, and gives countless quotations to verify his theories. Especially must the dawn be credited with innumerable inspirations. It is all very clear and vivid to me, because, so many mornings after my first awakening, I have lain here, and, looking out through the bay window upon the valley below, have watched the slow oncoming of the day; the spirit-like translucent dawn, filling the wide horizon; flushing out of pearly shadows into all bright prismatic tints, and then, as if abashed at her own unaccustomed brightness, fleeing swiftly to the western hill-tops, and in her very flight caught in the arms of her powerful lord, and melting in his embrace. A thousand such fancies have flitted through my brain as I lay here and watched ‘the day break and the shadows flee away,’ and here I find them all traced back to the dusky depths of the old Rig Veda, traditions, even there from the earlier pre-historic times; — wrought into glowing myths of Ushâsâ and Urvasî, and a little later re-appearing on Greek and Latin soil as Eos and Aurora, with variations, as in the story of Eurydice, and a score beside. At last Kalidâsa, a Brahminic poet, gathers

the fairest of all these pale wraiths of the morning twilight into a drama which embodies the story of Pururâvis and Urvasî. It is an exquisite creation, and the story of it, abridged even from Max Müller, with some extracts, I want to give you this evening. Will you hand me the book, please, from the table?"

Mr. Elms obeyed with alacrity. He was proud of Marion's brilliant critical faculty, and especially pleased that Lucia should witness a display of it. His wife might be an invalid, but he knew very well that intellectually she was the peer of the most brilliant and cultivated women, and he took all the deeper delight in her gifts because their radiance could never shine beyond the narrow limits of this secluded apartment, which was to him as sacred as a temple, and whose light was a perpetual shekinah to his soul.

"This opening up of the most ancient literature of the world by means of the study of Sanscrit," said Marion, as she opened the book, "is something more wonderful to me than the excavation of buried cities or the rebuilding of ancient tombs or temples out of their exhumed fragments. Marble and granite may give us the forms of an extinct life, but literature is life itself. This poem of Pururâvis and Urvasî is modern, yet the thought which it embodies is older than history; and still it breathes and palpitates before our gaze precisely as it did before the eyes of the first Aryan shepherd who watched the coy spirit of the dawn flush into passionate radiance upon the Bactrian hills. That the scenery is as unfamiliar as it is enchanting, and the imagery just sufficiently Oriental to defy the discipline to which we Occidentals subject the imagination, are *charms too novel* not to be welcome, and, altogether,

it enchants one. But listen, and you shall have a taste of it."

She adjusted herself to a favorable position, her husband sitting *vis-à-vis* by her side and holding her hand, while Lucia stood behind her, combing out her lovely mermaid-like hair, and braiding it into massive coils, or twisting it into a coronet of glory. So standing, Lucia had a full view of Mr. Elms's face. It was so deeply and radiantly happy, that for that instant it seemed clear to her that he had no need to envy any man who lived, or to be, on his own account, in the least degree dissatisfied with his own lot.

"It is astonishing," commenced Marion, demurely, "how all the powers of nature do contrive to go astray in their loves. The proper thing in all mythology seems to be that the sun should confine his passionate regards to the earth; and yet we find him perpetually sighing after fresh fields and pastures new. I confess that it is rather disheartening to me to see the crying sin of our own time traced back to such primeval and superhuman sources."

"The consolation is," said Chester, "that though the crime of marital infidelity is by no means new, the strong and growing sense that it *is* a crime, and is to be treated as such, and the agitation concerning the most rational ways and means of restraining it, is rather characteristic of the age; if not new, it is taking on a new form."

"Well, be that as it may," said Marion, "there is no nymph in all the mythological world who has caused quite so many slips as this same Aurora or Eos, or Ushâsa, or, as Kalidâsa chooses to call her, Urvasî, the *Dawn*. In the present instance, King Pururâvis, en

chariot, encounters Urvasî upon the Himalayan mountains, and rescues her from the clutches of a demon robber, presumably the Night. He falls in love with his *protégée*, as a matter of course, but after a brief interview she rejoins her companions and returns to Indra's heaven. At the parting, however, a straggling vine conveniently catches her garland and obliges her to turn her head once more toward Pururâvis; and now tell me what knight of Arthur's court could better have improved the opportunity to turn a compliment? The king meets Urvasî's glance, and exclaims, —

'A thousand thanks, dear plant, to whose kind aid
I owe another instant, and behold,
But for a moment, and imperfectly,
Those half-averted charms.'

"Urvasî coquettishly calls for help from one of her friends, who sagaciously replies, —

'No easy task, I fear; you seem entangled
Too fast to be set free. But come what may,
Depend upon my friendship.'

"The king returns to his palace at Allahabad disturbed in soul. A Brahmin is his confidant, and seems quite as *au fait* to the part as any French courtier or Italian monk of them all. He has his vulnerable point, however, and a female servant of the queen approaches him, and by well-timed stratagems finds out at last the king's secret, the reason of his altered demeanor, and speedily conveys it to the queen.

"But Urvasî, meantime, is as forlorn in heaven as the king at Allahabad. Attended by her friend, she approaches the garden in which the king has hidden

himself from all the world. They listen, invisible, to the king's plaint, and at last reveal themselves. The interview is brief, and Urvasî returns again to heaven, not, however, until she has inscribed a confession of her love upon a birch leaf, and dropped it near the king's bower. The king searches for the leaf, but fails to find it. As might be expected, an adverse wind carries the leaf to the queen, who has come into the garden to seek an interview with her lord. There is a scene of matrimonial upbraiding, and after a while the queen 'goes off in a hurry, like a river in the rainy season.' The king's misery seems now complete, for passionately as he loves Urvasî, he is still not indifferent to the queen's regards. Just here occurs a bit of scene-painting, which I quote:—

'Tis past midday. Exhausted by the heat,
The peacock plunges in the scanty pool
That feeds the tall tree's root; the drowsy bee
Sleeps in the hollow chamber of the lotus,
Darkened with closing petals. On the brink
Of the now tepid lake the wild duck lurks
Amongst the sedgy shades, and even here
The parrot from his wiry bower complains,
And calls for water to allay his thirst.'

"Meantime Urvasî, like any other love-lorn maiden, has managed to possess all heaven of the secret of her passion for the king, and to get herself into disgrace thereby; but Indra, a most complaisant god, declares for Pururâvis, who has heretofore been of service to him, and gives Urvasî permission to seek her royal lover, and devote herself to his service until such time as he shall behold the offspring which she shall bear him.

"*And now,*" said Marion, "I wish you to observe

the most remarkable incident of this drama. Considering that it is a heathen poet portraying heathen characters, I confess myself quite at a loss to account for it. The queen has meditated in secret upon this unhappy aberration of her lord, and has magnanimously concluded that she will graciously allow him to exercise his own free will in all matters of the affections without let or hinderance from her. At the critical moment therefore, when Urvashi has arrived at the king's bow-chamber but has yet not made herself visible, the queen sends a messenger to request an audience upon the terrace of the pavilion. Again there is some charming scene painting. It was just twilight, and the moon about to rise — the appropriate time, of course, for the nymph's appearance; and while the king waits for the queen he thinks of Urvashi, and soliloquizes after the manner of moon-struck lovers. As she is about, however, to throw off her veil, the queen approaches, dressed in white without any ornaments. The king admires her.

'In truth she pleases me, thus chastely robed
In modest white, her clustering tresses decked
With sacred flowers alone, her haughty mien
Exchanged for meek devotion; thus arrayed,
She moves with heightened charms.'

"The queen announces her determination, which is to bind herself by a vow to refrain from all interference with her lord's pastimes. She calls upon the god of the moon: —

'Hear and attest
The solemn promise that I make my husband:
Whatever nymph attract my lord's regard,
And share with him the mutual bonds of love,
I henceforth treat with kindness and complacency.'

"The Brahmin has his own ideas of her motives, and questions her. But she answers very nobly, protesting that her course is prompted only by love for the king, and a desire to promote his happiness."

"One would think," said Lucia, "that the king himself must have melted at that."

"He appears to have been moved, but only faintly. He accepts the grace, and, as in duty bound, treats the queen cordially, but with great dignity. She retires. Urvasî unveils herself immediately, and the recreant king resigns himself to her charms.

U.— 'I lament

I caused my lord to suffer pain so long.'

K.— 'Nay, say not so. The joy that follows grief

Gains richer zest from agonies foregone.

The traveller who, faint, pursues his track

In the fierce day, alone can tell how sweet

The grateful shelter of the friendly tree.'

"The remaining acts of this play follow the fortunes of Pururâvis and Urvasî. They are rich with imagination and exquisite fancy. Urvasî having, in a fit of jealousy, overstepped some religious boundary, becomes enchanted.

'She suffers now the penalty

Of her transgressions, and, to a slender vine

Transformed, there pines till time shall set her free.'

"The king searches for her in deep despair. He interrogates all nature. His plaints and his agonized inquiries of forests, of mountains, of elephants, of deer, of kids, are full of fine and true pathos, and the dramatic accompaniments of soft airs and strains of celestial music, and choruses of sympathizing nymphs, are charm-

ingly adapted to the sentiment. At last the king finds the gem which holds the magic spell to restore Urvasî to her lover. He holds it in his hands, and embraces the vine, which is now transformed into Urvasî. The gem is placed on Urvasî's forehead, and the king and his heavenly queen return to Allahabad.

“The last act recounts the discovery by the king of the son whom Urvasî has secretly borne him, and her grief that now the period of her absence from heaven has expired; but Indra is again touched with pity, and relents. Urvasî is permitted to remain with the king indefinitely. The prince is inaugurated as partner of the empire, and all go together to pay their homage to the queen, who has so generously resigned her right in favor of Urvasî, the heavenly nymph.”

CHAPTER VI.

"Now, is not that an exquisite story," said Marion, "to have grown from a germ so insignificant as a shepherd's observation of natural phenomena? The sun is rising, the dawn is gone; the sun sets, and the twilight comes again. The poetic child-mind personifies it all; and so we have the poem, and, according to Professor Müller, the myth, as well."

"What was true of the childhood of the race is, I think, generally true also of the childhood of the individual," said Lucia. "I never could really understand how poverty of language could result in poetry till Chester exemplified it to me; but now I realize perfectly why we, adults of advanced civilization, heirs of an inexhaustible treasury of thought and language, can never be poets, in the early sense of the word."

"Do give us an illustration," said Mr. Elms, "of child poetry. I have heard much of it, and I confess to having been told of some bright sayings of the Lilliputians, but I don't think I was ever enlightened by them concerning the origin of poetry."

"The only thing which occurs to me now," said Lucia, "is very simple, and yet rather pertinent. Once I took Chester into the country for a summer; it was when he was three years old. He soon learned, like the country children, to hunt the fruit of the mallows."

known to infancy as 'cheeses.' One day he was vainly searching among some unproductive leaves, when I said to him,—

"Come away, Chester; there are only leaves there."

"But, mamma," he answered, "are not the leaves the *mothers* of the cheeses?"

"Very good for Chester," said Mr. Elms, smiling, and evidently well pleased. "I must see if he has outgrown his poetic age."

"O," said Lucia, "its blossom is as brief in the individual as in the race. I doubt if, at seven years, there is usually a trace of it left."

"Blessed mother memories," said Mr. Elms; "how you ought to prize them!"

"But you are getting away from my poem," said Marion, with slight impatience. "I want to know if it strikes you, Chester, as it does me, as being wonderfully human and artistic to have been written by a heathen?"

Mr. Elms smiled. "Why," he said, "I think we are all beginning to learn that such words as 'gentile,' 'heathen,' 'outside barbarian,' and the like, are mere localisms. What really strikes me as the most remarkable thing in the play is, that in a polygamous country, where women are held in such abject servitude, even a poet should have dreamed of a character like your queen. That a king should go astray in his love, and that a nymph should respond, are truisms in fiction; but that even a queen should be so noble as voluntarily to sacrifice the whole honor and dignity of her married life to her husband's pleasure, seems to me a wonderful conception."

"*Perhaps she was a Buddhist,*" said Marion, coolly.

"Self-renunciation is the main feature of the Buddhist religion, you know. But, Chester, do you believe that the queen was justified in yielding, without a struggle, her husband's plighted faith?"

"Abundantly justified, I should say," said Chester. "I only wish the king had been a *man*—had shown himself equal to the emergency. There would have been no poem, it is true; but a life that is sound and true to the core is more than a poem. I wish there were more told us about that queen; I want to be acquainted with her."

"Well, I confess," said Marion, "that I feel but a very pale glow of admiration for her. I think she was weak-spirited. I am inclined to agree with the Brahmin, that it was mainly fear of the king which actuated her. 'The culprit who escapes before his hand is cut off determines never to run such a risk again.'"

"But if I remember," said Chester, "the queen expressly denies that imputation; and the fact that, on the solemn occasion of the crowning of the young prince, a procession was formed to pay homage to the queen, shows that she had so conducted as to retain universal respect."

"I do not know," said Lucia, "but I think I can faintly imagine a love so large and true, that it should bless God for the privilege of giving, as a grace and a guerdon, that which a more selfish nature would have withheld. May not the queen have reasoned, 'My love is great and noble; it may well be that I am not able to satisfy his whole heart. One thing I can do: I can be less a burden and a restraint to him than a wife would be who loved him less. If his heart be not *wholly and inevitably* mine, that is the will of the

gods, and I will not interpose my own poor selfishness."

Mr. Elms raised his eyes to Lucia's face with a glance of deep appreciation.

"*That* was the queen," he said. "If, now, the king had been her mate, and had said, 'My faith is plighted: *for truth's sake* I will be true;' would they not have been a royal pair? But to think that for *such* a nymph he should forsake *such* a queen!"

"But," said Marion, still unsatisfied, "to hold one's own, when it is a vital possession, may be selfishness, but it is a *poor* selfishness. When one renounces one's *self*, what has one left?"

"One's soul, perhaps," said Mr. Elms.

"May it not be said," said Lucia, "that there is both a human and a divine self? The human self may indeed be sacrificed, but the divine self is immortal, inviolable; it is that which remains, or may remain, when all the rest is gone."

"You are too metaphysical for me," said Marion, as Lucia, having bound up the golden hair, and covered it with a net, left the room. "I only know, dear Chester, that when I give up my love, I shall give up life itself. I am nothing apart from you. It is in you truly that I live and have my being."

He put his arms about her, and smiled serenely.

"My golden-haired Aurora," he said, "God be true to me only as I am true to you: Sleep lightly, my darling. Let no fear disturb your dreams. I *shall* be true."

Lifting her in his arms, he bore her to her couch, and laid her peacefully upon it. And she slept that *night as she had* not slept for weeks.

When Lucia left Marion's apartment, she went to the kitchen to make some preparations for the night, whither Mr. Elms followed her.

"My dear friend," he said, "I thought you looked weary as you left us, and I came out to see if anything could be done for you. If I had dreamed of all that was involved, I should never have had courage to ask you to come to us, in the first place."

Lucia looked up cheerfully, and replied, "Do you remember asking me if I were your friend? And when I replied in the affirmative, do you remember asking me again if that implied the service which you required; and that I told you, 'Yes, and far more, if need be'? Well, at that moment I foresaw, by simple, womanly prevision, what was likely to transpire. I am far from being sorry that I undertook the task; so let your heart have rest."

Preparations for possible emergencies were soon completed, and Lucia was ready to go home. Mr. Elms opened the garden door for her, and seeing that there was no moon, though the stars were out in infinite hosts, and filled the heavens with their glory, he walked across the lawn with her, and opened the wicket which led through the bittersweet wall.

It was early yet; the night air was balmy, and they lingered a moment, inhaling its fragrance. ✦

"There is something in such a night as this," said Mr. Elms, "to make one dream what it would have been to have been born a poet. Do you never, at such moments, have a feeling as if there were latent poetry in your veins, stirring and working as the sap flows through the roots when they feel the spring sun shining on them through the intervening earth?"

Lucia looked up with a deep light in her eyes. "Poetry is to me," she said, "as if all we roots, dwelling together under ground, should some day be startled by hearing one or other of our number break forth into prophetic hinting—for all prophecy is by hinting rather than by direct assertion—of the lovely blossoms which we all shall bear when we reach the upper air, and greet the smiling skies."

"That is a quaint conceit," he said, "and I like it; though I should have said that poetry is the soul trying her wings. At any rate, there must always be the element of ascension in all true poetry. One way or another, it must lift us up, must disengage us from the clod. If a poet only describes a flower, it is the soul of the flower which he sees; if he but paint a landscape, it is the landscape of an ascended vision."

"I wonder if you were struck, as I was," said Lucia, "when Mrs. Elms was reading her Hindu poem, with a certain sort of glad thankfulness, that God has not confined this wonderful gift of the imagination to any one people, but has spread it broadcast, like the light, over his whole world?"

"Yes; and not imagination only, but praise and worship, also, he has implanted in the hearts of all races of men. It was a poet of an idolatrous nation who wrote that living stanza,—

‘ But they, the truly wise,
Who know and realize
Where dwells the *Shepherd of the Worlds*, will ne’er
To any visible shrine,
As if it were divine,
Deign to raise hands of worship or of prayer.’ ”

They were both looking up to the infinite heavens, sown thick with stars, and realizing to themselves the majesty of that title, *THE SHEPHERD OF THE WORLDS*.

"It is good for the soul in silence to realize its own affiance with the Divine," said Mr. Elms. "Good night, sweet friend; in dreams go back to God, thy source, and drink in rest."

"Good night," she whispered softly, and they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

THE autumn opened warm and golden. The September suns, "the suns which ripen the corn," are often more trying to the human organization than any others of the year. Lucia, wearied already with unusual cares and watchings, began to feel her strength give way; but Janet was now well, and waited only till the cool weather should be firmly established to return to her duty. Another week, and Lucia might resume her old, quiet life, her boy's companionship, her simple, every-day duties and pleasures.

The duties and pleasures would be the same, but would Lucia herself be the same? It is one of the many momentous reflections concerning this strangely ordered human life, that no event which touches our personal history, however unsolicited it may come, however irresponsible we may be for its advent, leaves us precisely as it found us. Looking over the past few weeks, Lucia felt that, all things considered, she could not have pursued any other course than the one she had pursued. Mr. Elms had indeed been kind to her, and to her fatherless boy, when they were strangers among a strange people; and this had made it pleasant to do him a grateful service; but the obligation to succor helplessness and suffering was something deeper *and more imperative* still, inasmuch as the ties of our

common humanity underlie and precede all social conventions. Yet in doing her duty, Lucia was conscious that she had encountered loss. When she went back to her quiet commonplaces, they would be even more flavorless than they had been before. In these four or five weeks, a keen stimulus and zest had been imparted to her life, which she was conscious could not be extracted from it without leaving a sense of dullness and languor behind. Still, looking all the facts squarely in the face, she knew her duty, and felt that by God's help she should find means to fulfill it. A little incident which had recently occurred strengthened this resolution. It had been a sultry day, and she was coming out of Mrs. Elms's room, after two hours of constant attention, weary and exhausted. As she stepped into the dim, unlighted drawing-room, it happened that Mr. Elms, who had been absent all the evening, had just entered at the garden door. He was dressed in a white suit, and, as he stood in a shaft of pale moonlight which crept in at a window, it was not difficult for a tired imagination and unstrung nerves to convert this tall white apparition into something startling and terrifying. Lucia uttered one little exclamation, and fell back against the wall, not swooning, but only in a state of half-suspended consciousness.

"Lucia," cried Mr. Elms, "I have frightened you; forgive me, I pray you."

He approached her, but she did not speak; and, accustomed as he was to his wife's light burden, he caught her in his arms and bore her into his own room, near the door of which she was standing, and laid her upon the bed. Lucia was conscious now, but the *shock* had completely unnerved her, and she lay for an

instant helpless, while he brought cologne and bathed her brow. The touch of his hand startled her back to life again.

"O," she said, "please leave me; I must rise and go home at once. I am quite well now. I was only a little surprised."

Looking up, she caught a glance of passionate pity in his eyes which she had never seen there before. She rose instantly, and with perfect self-possession bade him good night, and would have gone immediately away. But he held her hand for a moment, and detained her.

"I cannot let you go," he said, "with that scared, excited look in your eye. Lie here a moment, and rest; I will leave you. You need a little stimulant, and I am not sure but something more. Let me bring you a glass of wine."

She refused everything, feeling only that nothing else could be so necessary to her, as to reach the quiet of her own room; but he made her sip the wine, and at last a few drops of anodyne which he prepared.

"I can see in your eyes," he said, "that you will not sleep well to-night without this, and I could not rest if I knew that you were keeping a vigil. So, out of pity, please take it."

She took it, and declared herself quite calm; and then he suffered her to go. But she kept her vigil, in spite of the anodyne.

The last day of her trial had arrived. Janet was to come on the morrow. She had already performed her evening duties, and was only waiting for Mr. Elms to come in before taking her leave. The evening was fine and clear, except a thin haze which hung over the val-

ley, and tempered the full tide of the moonlight to just a chaste and silvery glow. She went out upon the piazza, and seating herself in a great straw arm-chair, resigned herself to reverie. She had sat there a half hour perhaps, when, before she was aware of his approach, she heard Mr. Elms's voice in the doorway.

"I am glad to find you here," he said, "for I have something to say to you. It is early yet; you will give me half an hour — will you not?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," she replied, feeling, the while, that it must be their last confidential chat together. Janet's coming home would make that all right, however, and to-night she need not fear.

"I want to talk with you about Chester," he said; "do you know I am getting very fond of the child?"

"I do know," she said, "that your goodness to him is something wonderful; and, believe me, I feel most grateful."

"It is not a case for thanks," he said. "I do but please myself in thinking of my little namesake as in some sense my own child. You will not be offended if I say that — will you?"

She paused, hardly knowing what reply to make.

"Surely," she said, at last, "I could desire no better thing for my child than your friendship."

"At least, I mean to make it of worth to him," he said; "because I owe both you and him that much return for the comfort he is to me. The truth is, I have a little plan about him, which I wish to lay before you. Only it must be between you and me alone, with just God for witness. Shall it be so?"

She looked up, startled.

"Nay, do not let me frighten you," he said; "it is

nothing at all fearful. Let me tell you, first, a little of my own early life. My mother was a second wife, and I her only child. She was not over well beloved by my half-sister and her family, and her home was not always too happy. She had one bachelor brother, then the owner of all this manufacturing property which is my burden now. He asked me of her, and she consented to my coming here to live with him. It ended in his adopting me, and making me his heir. When my father died, his estate was divided between Hortense and myself. My patrimony was not large, but it has accumulated, until now it is a handsome property of itself. That is sacred to Marion, and if I were to die to-day it would abundantly provide for all her wants. I know her heart, and I know that in such a case she would not desire to be embarrassed with superfluous riches. Besides, it was my uncle Bradshaw's wish—a wish which I feel sacredly bound to respect—that his property might never pass into the hands of my father's family; and Marion being my cousin on my father's side, her heirs would be Hortense's children. So you see this mill property is *mine*, to do whatever I please with. Have you any objection to my making a manufacturer of Chester?"

Lucia was dumb with surprise.

"Mr. Elms," she said, at last, "what do you—what can you mean?"

"Simply this," he answered, in a tone that was very serious. "If Chester were my son, instead of being only my namesake, I should educate him with a view to his becoming my successor in business. As it is, I have studied him closely, and I believe that he will, *with proper training*, make a superior business man. I

have counted so much upon your acquiescence in my plans, that I have this week made my will, in due form, and it now lies, with my other papers, at my lawyer's office, giving to you, in trust for Chester until his coming of age, all my interest in the mills, and providing for his education meantime. I have done this because I wanted to make good my right to be the boy's guardian and friend. Pardon me, Lucia, but he has a strong nature, and needs a firmer hand than any woman's. Can you have confidence enough in me to let me guide him?"

"My dear friend," said Lucia, after a pause, "this is far too momentous a matter to be settled by a 'Thank you.' I think you do not need to be told how highly I should prize your aid in rearing my boy. I would gladly trust him utterly in your hands. I have the fullest confidence in your wisdom and love; but it seems to me you cannot have considered all the contingencies. Pardon me if I am very frank, but you are a young man yet; a thousand things may happen. Mrs. Elms may recover; indeed, I think she looks forward to it; and then your future may be all so different. Or there may even be more radical changes. Long before Chester is grown, you may have a family of your own."

"Permit me to interrupt you, Lucia," he said; "it is only natural that you should say this; and yet it pains me. You cannot imagine that I have thought of all these things for the first time during these past few weeks. I have been over the ground again and again, step by step, for hours at a time. I never have told my thoughts to any one, but it is right that you *should know them*. I know that Marion hopes to

recover, and I know that there is a possibility — say one chance in five thousand — that she may; but, if it happens, it will be a miracle; and in this life we have no right to count upon miracles. Besides, I know her constitution thoroughly, and if she were restored to the best health which is possible to her, I do not believe that she could survive the perils of maternity. She is as frail as a crystal vase; and yet with good care she may live twenty years. Setting aside dreams and imaginations, then, that is just where I stand. I would not say the words to any other human being, because I could not trust any other to understand me; but, practically, I have no wife, neither can I have; neither, of course, can I have a child that shall be my own, and that is the reason why I ask of you the right to love and care for Chester. I do love the boy; I loved his father before him, and he is not the less dear to me, Lucia, because he has the glint of your eye and the piquant music of your voice. Whatever may happen, even to the remotest possibility, if you trust me in this matter you shall never repent your trust. Lucia, my life is very lonely; do not deny me.”

His voice was pitiful, and there were unshed tears in his eyes. It was plain to Lucia that there was in his mind no thought of the wrong which he was doing his wife by entering into a secret understanding of this sort. For a moment she revolved this objection in her mind. She knew what Marion's feelings were towards children — towards her child in particular; but it was not possible that she should mention this flaw in his wife's character to Mr. Elms. And was it necessary that a prejudice, in itself so ungenerous, should stand between *her friend* and his pleasure? her boy and a future so

alluring? The temptation was an insidious one, and with an impulse more generous than just, she answered,—

“My dear, dear friend, it was never for a moment in my heart to give you pain, but your offer is so munificent it was but natural to feel for an instant that a vision so splendid could not be based upon reality. I have only one thing to stipulate. Chester must not know of your future intentions. You shall educate and train him as you please: that, of itself, will be a fortune, possibly the best fortune which you can give him; then if, by and by, the money should be his, he will know how to use it. But you must not spoil him with visions of things which, I cannot help feeling, may never come to pass.”

“Lucia,” he said, “reaching out both hands to her, “how sensible you are! There will never be a cloud between us, I am sure, in bringing up this boy. We shall see eye to eye in all things, I truly believe. And O, Lucia, you cannot imagine the happiness which you have conferred upon me.”

It was not in human nature to be unmoved. Lucia rose and stood by his side.

“Mr. Elms,” she said, “you would not have spoken to me as you have this night, if you could not trust my sincerity; and so I dare to tell you how much I wish your future might be changed. I believe I would give five years of my life just simply to see Marion restored to you in the full strength of womanhood, to be your own true wife, the mother of your babes. I may even tell you in this moment, what I never dared to say before, how much I have admired the strength and true nobility of your soul, by which you carry the burden

den of your life so steadily poised, and with such un-failing buoyancy."

"Ah, Lucia," he said, "I do not know if even you may safely touch upon those themes."

"Forgive me," she replied, "but your generous goodness seems to-night to have thrown down some barriers which nothing ought to have shaken."

"It is not so," he said. "Between your soul and mine God never placed a barrier. Have you not felt that from the first?"

"I have felt from the first," she said, "that you were different from all the men I ever saw before. Can you tell me why it is that your soul has always seemed to me as transparent as a woman's. I never knew an atmosphere so absolutely clear of every cloud or vapor."

He sat in silence for a moment. Then in a low, deliberate voice he answered,—

"We men go out into the world, and divers and multitudes of burs cling to our garments; but I thank God that by no act of mine has my soul been made unworthy of the friendship of the purest woman that ever breathed."

"Proud soul," she said.

"Am I proud?"

"The proudest *Christian* that I ever knew."

He pursed up his under lip with a smiling grimace which he was wont to use. But even while he had been speaking there had come to Lucia a sense of what it was that he had told her, and so she softly added,—

"And you have a right to be proud. I never knew till now why it is that you, of all the men I ever knew, *have always* — so to speak — compelled my friendship

upon perfectly equal terms. I love you, using that word in its general, and not at all in its particular sense, just as unreservedly as I would love a woman."

He smiled, and softly stroked her hand.

"Life has brought me no sweeter boon," he said, "than your friendship. Just when my heart was growing weary, you came, and I thank God for you."

"Do I, then, comfort you?" she asked, beseechingly.

"Yes, inexpressibly."

There was some further chat, mainly about Chester, and then she left him.

Janet came back to her post with some apprehension of finding matters in a bad plight. Her surprise that things were, after all, no worse than they were, vented itself to Norah in the kitchen; from which voracious historian she received a tolerably accurate account of what had transpired in her absence. Janet was discreet; moreover, she had bowels of compassion for her master, and was, besides, absolutely devoid of that special instinct for disturbing the elements which pertains to most single women. But secretly she was curious to know how Mrs. Elms stood affected by the recent course of events.

"I should think, madam," she said, by way of round-about allusion, "that you have been doing wonderfully well without me. I confess I am not flattered to find how little you have missed me."

"You find, then, that Mr. Elms has been made comfortable?" asked Marion, very directly. "I feared that he might have suffered more than I, from your absence."

Janet dropped her eyes,

"All things considered, I think he has been admirably cared for."

Not another word was said; but Janet, instead of gaining an idea, had conveyed one. During the discussion which had followed the reading of Purûravis and Urvasî, Marion had noticed the glance with which Mr. Elms had greeted Lucia's defence of the queen. It had dropped upon her consciousness like a tiny spark, which has not of itself life enough to kindle a conflagration, but which simply burns out and leaves a blackened scar. Janet's words, or, rather, the sudden dropping of her eyes, fell like a fresh spark upon the old tinder. Marion's nature was intrinsically noble. She could not otherwise have gained and held the ascendancy over her husband which she undoubtedly possessed. No word or glance betrayed to Chester the perturbation of her mind; but hereafter she had a new subject for study during the long hours which she passed in lonely silence. Strangely enough, this fresh mental excitement allayed her pains. She grew quiet; returned, with the cool weather, people said, to her normal condition. The racking of mind, which took the place of physical torture, not even Chester suspected.

"A woman in health," she said to herself, "might grow jealous, and hold her husband to his duty with a strong hand. I cannot do that. Tact and patience are my weapons." And she drew in her breath hard. "With these I shall prevail." But tact, and patience, and indomitable will, would have had but a poor show in the fight if they had not been wielded by a love intense as a flame, and inexorable as death.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR the first week after Janet's return, Lucia had quite enough to do to bring her own neglected affairs into order, and to turn over again and again in her mind her new relationship with Mr. Elms. She could easily foresee that this mutual interest in Chester, especially since it must be kept a secret, might bring them upon terms of dangerous intimacy. Yet she felt certain that Mr. Elms's intentions were pure; and she was herself so innocent of anything but a tender and friendly sympathy for his peculiar trials, that it seemed wrong to doubt that God would bless and prosper the relation.

The future which Mr. Elms offered to her boy was not only a dazzling one, it had its solid and substantial benefits. She could hardly bring herself to believe that Chester would ever be the owner of the Elmdale Mills; that he should be reared under the immediate influence of a man like Mr. Elms; should be educated under his direction; should take his first views of life in the companionship of a mind so strong and pure: these were boons which, in Lucia's estimation, quite outvalued the bauble of wealth.

It was two or three days before she had time to go down and look at her garden. In fact, she had not dared to contemplate its neglected condition until she should conquer a little leisure in which to restore it.

But one bright morning she rose early, and putting on a linen suit, took her garden implements and ran down the terrace steps. At the foot of them surprise arrested her footsteps, and she stood for a moment in motionless contemplation. Her beloved beds were in perfect order; not a weed was visible; every wandering spray was pruned or fastened to its trellis; and through all the drought some kind providence had evidently visited the scene with daily showers. She looked up, and Mr. Elms was smiling at her wonderment over the bitter-sweet wall.

"How shall I thank you?" she said.

"I do not feel the need of thanks," he replied; "surely it was a little thing to do to keep your garden in order, when you were spending your days and nights in my service. Besides, I am always glad to please you; and I see by your face that you are pleased. That is enough."

She had nothing left to do but to gather bouquets for the parlor; but as she wove the flowers together, delicately blending their varied hues in combinations which pleased her eye, she paused, now and then, to offer a silent prayer for strength.

Mr. Elms, meantime, was vigorously prosecuting his plans concerning Chester.

"He must have better training than the district school affords him," he said. "It is time he was commencing Latin, and I want him also to be a good French and German scholar. The languages are best acquired in youth; so, because we can neither of us deprive ourselves of his company, he must have a teacher at home. It will not be difficult to arrange that. I *know just the person*, and I shall give him some sort

of sinecure in the counting-room of the mills, which will leave him ample leisure to attend to Chester without causing remark."

So Chester rose early every morning, and rode to the mills with Mr. Elms, and was back before school time; and after school hours recited to Mr. Le Bœuf, and in the evening tormented his mother for stories, and grew in wisdom, and mischief, and promise, after the fashion of boys who are healthy and happy, and thoroughly well cared for.

But while Lucia was fighting her battle womanfully, and ruling her own spirit, determined that, whatever happened, there should be in her life no wicked dalliance with sentiment, no weak sighing after the impossible; and Marion lay upon her bed, her imagination soaring to the stars, and her will penetrating to all depths of human experience in search of devices, wherewith to make monotony captivating, Mr. Elms was studying anew the problems of his life. Lucia had been in some sense a new revelation to him. Her fresh, impulsive, racy nature was something as different as possible from Marion's stately elegance of mind and manner. Marion was a rare waxen exotic; but Lucia was a fresh and dewy wild rose; and was it a sin against the one that he should admire the other? Nay, the deeper and more vital query was, was it not in some sort doing a violence to his best nature *not* to let his admiration go out cheerfully and spontaneously to a soul that so innocently challenged it? He had noticed and approved of Lucia's quiet withdrawing of herself from his presence, when his need of her was past; but he never met her without longing to win her back into the old *friendly intercourse*. He was often perplexed, often

wearied ; but not one of those wearinesses, not one of those perplexities, could he carry into the rarefied atmosphere of his wife's apartment. His intercourse with her was all pure, elevated, ideal. But Lucia was so human, and so helpful, that not a knot or an entanglement of all the daily lines of life could not be carried to her. Very likely she might not be able really to help him in the least ; but the serene and hopeful ray of her eye, the unguessed and therefore welcome turn of her voice, or her phrase, drew him out of himself, and comforted him. This placid and trustful companionship was exactly what he most missed in his life. Would it be wrong for him to seek it where he knew it was to be found ? He did not know, though he half guessed, how many hearts had broken themselves, how many feet had gone wofully astray out of just this dilemma. He only knew that he was true at heart, and meant always to be true, but that, besides, he was very hungry for something which his life did not bring him.

Marion watched him keenly. With an acuteness of perception of which he could not dream, she followed all the variations of his mood, knew exactly when he was giving himself up with the old *abandon* to the charm of her society, and when his thoughts were straying. She estimated his position very justly. She said to herself, "He is shut up here to this quiet, monotonous life, which, if he had such a home as other men have, a home which should be the centre of a wide circle of social ties and enjoyments, must, at times, be wearisome. If he ever goes to town, he makes the visit as short as may be on my account. His life is confined mainly to *business, to books, and to me.* He must have more

scope. Another year I *must* be well enough to travel with him. That will be a grand relief. But to tide over this winter, I must let him go without me. After Christmas he shall pay Hortense a visit, and take his fill of the pleasures of town life."

Just as she had reached this conclusion, she became aware that some such thought was also revolving in his own mind. To tell the truth, it was little Chester's restless hand which had fired the train.

Christmas was approaching, and, child-like, he was speculating upon probabilities.

"Shall we have a Christmas tree here, mamma, as we used in New York?" he asked.

"I fear not, Chester," his mamma replied. "Grand-mamma is not used to it, and it would be a great deal of trouble to take for just one chick like you."

Chester pouted, and ran off to his namesake.

"This is just the dullest old town I ever heard of," he declared. "I shall be going to sleep some day, like Rip Van Winkle in the story book, and never waking up for twenty years. Now, in New York there was always a Christmas tree, and I could go out on Broadway, besides, and see all the fine sights; but here there are no shops, and there's nothing at home but just, may be, a book put by one's plate, or a pair of skates, perhaps."

He looked up with a glance askance of inquiry, which made his namesake laugh outright.

"Now, what would be done," he added, "if anybody should give me a pair of skates? They couldn't be put into my stocking, and they wouldn't look well on the table by my plate; and I don't see what would be done *with them*."

"Chester," said Mr. Elms, "how would you like to go to New York for a visit after Christmas?"

Chester's eyes sparkled.

"Wouldn't that be *jolly*!" he exclaimed. "Could you and I go off alone, do you think? Would mamma — no, would grandmamma let us?"

"Well, those are serious questions, Chester; questions which it will take a wiser head than yours or mine to answer. Meantime, don't you say a word to anybody about it. You know you *can* keep a secret."

"Indeed I can," said Chester, proudly.

"Well, just keep this secret, then; but when we break the next wish-bone together, we'll both wish for it — won't we?"

"Well," said Chester, sagaciously, "if *you* wish for it, I'll bet we go."

It happened that a few days after this interesting conversation, Lucia, coming down from her own room into the parlor, one evening, found Mr. Elms quietly ensconced in the chimney corner enjoying a cosey chat with Mrs. Denney. It was an unusual thing for Mr. Elms to pay them a formal call, and Lucia listened rather intently to learn its object. Apparently it was business; for after a greeting and an explanation, Mr. Elms went on to say, —

"I think that you will find this a good time to sell out your bank stock; and the other investment, I am certain, will yield you better dividends. You know that I never urge any financial measures upon you; but, really, I think this is too good an opportunity to be lost."

"I will think about it," replied Mrs. Denney. "I suppose the business could all be transacted without my *leaving home*."

"It might be, certainly," replied Mr. Elms; "but I think it would be wiser for you to go to New York yourself, and make such inquiries there as would satisfy you in the matter. I should be very sorry if the transaction, after it was completed, left any trace of uneasiness in your mind."

"I do not like to make such a journey in the winter," said Mrs. Denney. "I am getting too old for those things."

"But, mother," said Lucia, unsuspectingly, "if Chester and I went with you, I am sure you would not mind the inconvenience; and there are really some matters of my own in New York which require attention, only I have not thought that I could leave you alone in the winter. And Chester would enjoy it so much!"

Mrs. Denney was still musing, and Mr. Elms, who had been for years her financial adviser, pretty accurately divined her thought.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I am going to town for a visit myself, after Christmas, and should be most happy to be your escort. I am sure I need not remind you, Mrs. Denney, of the deep obligation which I am under to your family, an obligation the more embarrassing, because it is one so difficult suitably to acknowledge. Now, if you would consent, in making this visit to New York, to put the entire conduct of it into my hands, and let me take every care about it from your mind, I think I could promise you an enjoyable programme; and at the same time I should feel that it was a welcome opportunity for expressing my gratitude. I want, besides, to make you acquainted with my sister Hortense and her family. You have never met them, I think."

Lucia looked up with amazement at this proposition, and suddenly left the room. She could not be a party to this plot; neither, considering her obligations to Mr. Elms, could she openly object to it.

"I must believe," said Mrs. Denney, serenely, "that I have reached my second childhood, since I allow myself to be so easily persuaded; but your goodness quite disarms me. I know, of course, how dull this life must seem to Lucia; and really she has been so good a daughter to me, that I owe her some consideration. You shall have it quite your own way, Chester, it being, of course, understood that our obligation to you shall be wholly for duties, and not at all for dues. I have never, as you say, met Mrs. Van Benschoten and her family, but should esteem their acquaintance very highly."

Mr. Elms was wise enough to conceal his inward satisfaction under the guise of a formal bow, and soon after took his leave. Lucia contrived to meet him in the hall as he went out, for the purpose of presenting her protest.

"Well," she said, with a deep-drawn breath, "I trust you leave this house a baffled conspirator. How could you spring your trap after you had seen me walk into it with such unconscious boldness?"

"On the contrary," he replied, with his gayest smile, "you are my debtor for unlimited congratulations. I have accomplished all that I intended, and that you and Chester shall visit New York with me is already a foregone conclusion. And yet you have only reproaches for me."

"Chester Elms, is no one in this world to cherish *pride* except yourself?"

"Lucia," he said, pleadingly, "I *am* proud, and I beg you to let nothing which relates to you and me be placed on ground so low as this you strive to occupy. You know my life, you know its needs, and you have promised to be my friend : is not that enough ?"

"Ah, Mr. Elms," she answered, "if I could be certain that it was your good angel which had planned this adventure, I should have not a word to say ; but I fear, I fear you will repent it."

"Lucia," he said, with deepening seriousness of manner, "you pain me. It is not easy for me to retract my word, but if you really wish me to do so, I will abandon the whole project."

"What will Marion say ?" she asked.

His pride had been a pretence heretofore, but now it stirred in reality.

"Marion can *trust* her husband," he answered, with a glance in his eye that was fit for the quelling of lions.

She was silent for a moment, her head bowed down. He held out his hand to her in token of amity. She looked up, smiling through dim eyes.

"Mr. Elms," she said, "you always conquer me, and always the victory ennobles me. If I can give you pure enjoyment, you shall have it, in spite of selfish fears or worldly scruples."

"That is my queen," he said, clasping her hand ; "that is my friend. Leave all to me, and God forgive me if I ever cause you a moment's pain, for I could never forgive myself."

Time proved that Lucia was the wiser seer, and put to shame these proud predictions. The lesson was one of *price, yet in the end well won*, since out of it came

to the one grace and patience, to the other wisdom and strength.

Perhaps the most serenely happy of the three that night was Mrs. Denney. In former times she had done Lucia a great injustice, the consequences of which, she had some reason to feel, could not be undone in a moment. It was now humiliating to her own pride to see that Lucia was regarded a little askance by society. But if Mr. Elms were to escort them as a family to New York, and if his sister were to pay them attention, who in all Ashland should dare thereafter, by so much as a glance, or a whisper, to recall the shadow of the past?

It remained only for Mr. Elms to announce his plans to his wife.

"Marion," he said, one evening, as Christmas drew near, "it is quite time that we made some acknowledgment to Mrs. Denney for her service during Janet's absence."

"Certainly," she replied, with characteristic steadiness; "what do you propose?"

"Why," he said, "it is a matter a little difficult, but I think I have arranged it so that the acknowledgment shall be sufficient, and yet injure no one's sensitiveness. Madam Denney will have occasion to go to New York shortly to attend to some property she has there, and Lucia and Chester will probably accompany her. I intend making them my guests, and introducing them to my sister. I know such a scheme would be a real favor to Madam Denney, besides that it would please her to be recognized by Hortense."

He had not said all that he intended to say, but he paused.

"I had thought," she said, "that some delicate gift would be quite adequate; but doubtless you know best."

"A piece of table silver?" he said, inquiringly. "I know Mrs. Denney very well; believe me, she would accept nothing more valuable."

Marion was silent for a moment.

"Chester," she said, at length, "I do not choose that you should shield me so from pain, because it is unworthy both of you and me. Neither is it necessary."

"Pardon me," he replied, "but I intended no subterfuge. I meant freely to tell you that I expect to receive quite as much pleasure as I shall confer by this arrangement. I am going to town for recreation mainly. You know that Hortense's family are not much to my mind, and I prefer not to spend my holiday alone. I shall take care to observe all the outward proprieties; and I think, dear Marion, that you can trust my heart's allegiance. Your true and faithful husband I always have been, and always shall be. I have answered Mrs. Denney's scruples by saying that my wife could trust me. Is it not true?"

She looked at him with steady valor beaming in her eyes.

"Chester," she said, passionately, "I *can* trust you — your strength, your purity, your truth; you are not like other men; you are my tall white lily, shining in the sun; my morning star, my bright archangel. Go, take your fill of enjoyment, and every hour that you are gone, I will pray that your happiness may be complete. As you are true to me, so, in a different sense, will I be true to you."

Was it Margaret Fuller who said that a truth-teller is a truth-compeller?

So one true soul forces nobility upon all around it. But Marion was gifted with keener perceptions than her husband, or else she was less blinded by impulse. She knew there was danger in the path his feet were treading, and her prayers for him, though more earnest, were less serene and hopeful than she had pictured them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE middle of Christmas week found the Denneys comfortably established in a handsome suite of rooms at a quiet up-town hotel, while Mr. Elms was domiciled with his sister. Mrs. Denney had at first made some objections to so expensive a plan; but Mr. Elms had pleaded his own convenience in a manner which was not to be resisted. In fact, he was in so gay a mood that there was no gainsaying him about anything. On the very morning after they arrived he had insisted upon taking Chester out with him for the purpose of refitting his wardrobe.

Lucia meant to be firm upon this point, and to maintain her own prerogative intact; but Mr. Elms laughingly insisted.

"Why, the young man must have boots," he said; "and I fancy you passing judgment upon the respective merits of calf-skin and split-leather. You would be swindled in the most egregious manner. We can't trust mamma in the matter of boots; can we, Chester?"

Chester had long ago learned the difference between his mamma's shopping and Mr. Elms's, and he was loud in his choice.

"No, indeed," he said; "you are tired; you know you are, mamma. Now lie down and take a good rest while Mr. Elms and I are gone."

So it ended, as it usually did, in their having their own way.

It was lunch time and past before they returned ; and when at last Lucia heard their steps, and looked up at the opening of the door, she uttered a loud exclamation of surprise, which sent Mr. Elms and Chester off into peals of laughter.

"How frightened mamma looks!" said Chester ; "isn't that a good joke?"

And well might mamma look startled ; for during the two hours of his absence her hopeful son had undergone a change of costume, which was, to say the least, surprising, and appeared before her in the disguise of a fine Scotch Highlander, a veritable Prince Charlie. From the toe of his buskin to the tip of his eagle's feather, there was nothing wanting to the picture. The dress certainly became the child, or rather, perhaps, the child became the dress ; for, catching the inspiration of the character, to Mr. Elms's infinite amusement, he bore himself entirely as if he were to the manner born.

"But, Chester," said his mamma, "you can't promenade Broadway in that attire."

"O," said Mr. Elms, "there is a less striking suit ordered. It will be here presently, together with the boots."

At that moment a knock at the door indicated the arrival of the purchases, and mamma, after due inspection, gratefully pronounced them faultless.

"But where are the shoes you wore out this morning?" she said.

This question was the signal for fresh merriment on the part of Mr. Elms.

"O," said he, "you should have seen the tragedy of the shoes. When the boots were selected, the young man begged hard to have them put on immediately, and the shopman was so good as to accommodate him, when, what was my amazement to see him march to the door, with the shoes in his hand, and deliberately throw them into the middle of Broadway!"

"Well," said Chester, looking a little foolish, "I never mean to wear shoes any more, I am sure."

"Why, Chester," said Lucia; "those good shoes which I had designed for house wear all winter."

Chester looked a little sulky, but had no apologies to offer. He had forsworn shoes.

"Don't scold us, mamma," said Mr. Elms, laughing heartily. "It is a royal youth. I might have interfered, but it was impossible to arrest so dramatic a purpose. Chester, show mamma how you can wield a claymore. Shall we not astonish the rural population of Ashland, do you think?"

"If you do not quite spoil the child," said Lucia, under her breath, "I shall be thankful."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Elms, gayly. "You should see how loyally he obeys me. He is as true as steel. He would face death with me any minute. There is no danger of spoiling such a nature."

On New Year's morning it became apparent for what the Highland suit had been intended.

Mr. Elms came in early and requested that Chester should be dressed in his Prince Charlie costume, and go with him to make a few calls.

"I am going to introduce him," he said, "to my sister, and then to her daughter, Mrs. Brevoort, who lives in the same square, and possibly to two or three

other ladies. I shall bring him safely home before lunch, and after that you will see nothing of me all day, as Colonel Hector Van Benschoten, my estimable nephew, proposes to take me the rounds in his new equipage."

While Chester was dressing, Lucia gave him no end of admonitions concerning his behavior; but they all seemed so utterly to fail of making any impression upon him, that she was in despair. But just as Mr. Elms was drawing on his gloves, he said, —

"Now, Chester, remember that to-day you are upon honor. You are not to use 'I'll bet,' nor 'bully good,' nor 'like blazes,' nor any other of those graphic expressions which slip so easily off your tongue. There are times when boys may very properly be boys; I was a boy once myself, and I haven't forgotten it; but to-day you are to be a gentleman."

To his mamma's amazement, Chester was all attention.

"I understand, sir," he said; "and it's honor bright."

And Chester, to do him justice, was perfectly equal to the *rôle*. Not once during the entire morning did he forget himself. And his manner, when Mrs. Van Benschoten took him by the hand and addressed him some formal remark, not only might have been copied into a behavior book without an alteration, but it was graceful and easy besides. Lucia received them upon their return with some anxiety; but the first glance at Mr. Elms's happy face re-assured her.

"Chester has distinguished himself," he said; "no young lad of Fifth Avenue could have done better. Now, Prince Charlie, you can lay aside your dignity

and disport yourself as you please for the rest of the day, subject only to your mamma's mild rule and grandmamma's nerves."

And with a happy smile and bow to all the party, he was off.

On the following day Mrs. Van Benschoten and her daughter, Mrs. Brevoort, left cards, and soon after came an invitation to dinner.

It was an event which Lucia had a little dreaded, but which, for every reason, could not be dispensed with.

"I have made it as easy as I could for you," said Mr. Elms, mischievously. "I have represented you as a lady of fortune and expectations, which, together with your personal charms, will insure you the most assiduous attentions from the gallant colonel. Hector contemplates marriage as a means of replenishing his somewhat damaged exchequer, and I await the results of my plotting with intense interest."

"Ah," she said, "you are making sport of me. How could you do so cruel a thing?"

"It was rather cruel to Hector, I confess," he said. "But then, as you will see, he is the sort of person with whom the tender sentiments are not likely to take on dangerous forms. He wouldn't marry a houri for less than ten thousand a year. The truth is, I was afraid you would find the visit stupid if I did not prepare some sort of diversion for you."

"I think you might have trusted me," she said, inclined to pout, "to find my own diversion."

"O," he replied, "not even your genius could extract entertainment from Hector unless he felt the gentle influence of a stimulant. His usual resource is brandy ;

but as I know that no form of inebriety is amusing to you, I ventured to employ a substitute."

"You draw a flattering picture of your nephew," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I have not concealed from you," he answered, "the slumbering feud which exists between the family of my half-sister and myself. Naturally, Hortense is a woman of strong character; but the love of money, and of that which money represents, has honey-combed her through and through. Of her children, Hector is certainly not to my taste; but Isabel Brevoort is bright, good-humored, and if she chooses, really agreeable. I want you to be friends with her, though, to tell the truth, if she were aware that I had designs for Chester, no sincere good-will would be possible between you."

"Do you know," said Lucia, "that upon that score I feel very guilty?"

"You need not," said Mr. Elms. "As I have shown you, they are utterly incompetent to inherit the Bradshaw property. I cannot even will it to them; and if I do not bestow it in some other direction, it will go eventually to a charitable institution. If I were to accumulate anything from the income of it during my lifetime, *that* I might possibly leave to Isabel's children. Upon this remote possibility they insist upon building hopes. Such hopes I feel not the slightest compunction in thwarting; neither, I think, should you. So success to you in your flirtation with Hector; for unless you should fancy him, I see no prospect of his ever being benefited by my want of legal heirs."

"I never knew you in so insufferable a mood," she said. "If you make one more such speech, I shall refuse to visit your sister entirely."

"Forgive me," he said, penitently, "if what I have said has been amiss. The attitude of this family towards me does, in the long run, exasperate me; and as you have, in a certain limited sense, taken me for better, for worse, I shall, perhaps, sometimes try your patience; but you do not harbor a sense of injury, I trust?"

She only answered with a smile; but it was a smile which concluded peace between them.

CHAPTER X.

ON the evening of the dinner at Mrs. Van Benschoten's, Lucia stood in her room surveying her dress, which had just arrived from the dress-maker. She had foreseen the necessity of some preparation for the event, and had made it her first business on her arrival in town to purchase a dress-pattern, and secure the services of a *modiste*. The result was before her, in a soft rich silk of a delicate violet hue. It was open at the throat, and filled in with fine laces. The fit of it from the curve of the full bust to the last fold of the sweeping train was admirable. Her hair was dressed in her own simple fashion, and when she had donned the festive robe, she felt very well satisfied with her appearance. Her ornaments were few, but she had found a heavy linked chain of Etruscan gold, to which she attached her exquisite Psyche; and when it was clasped about her neck she needed nothing more. But as she held it in her hand, swift memories carried her back to the moment when her father had presented it to her. She recalled his words, and the bright eye and the hectic flush, paling already before the hue of death, which had lent their weighty emphasis to his charge, "The quest of life, my child, is to find one's soul." She dropped the bauble in her lap, and leaned back in the heavy arm-chair, which she had drawn before the mirror, and *fell into a reverie*.

"To find one's soul!" What did the words mean? She ran hastily over the experiences of her life, but nowhere could she discover an event which fitted itself to this quaint and solemn phrase. She could not even surmise its exact meaning. The preachers talked of souls that were lost: was hers in that category? She did not believe it. Though of a religious nature, she had little faith in the ordinary forms of religion. Indeed, she could not remember that her father had ever enjoined them upon her, though she remembered well a certain tender and unspeakable reverence which always marked his manner when he spoke of Christ. Yet he had found his soul. She had no doubt of that. She could not but feel that strange and tempestuous elements were gathering in her life. There might be, indeed, she feared there were, storms, veritable hurricanes and cyclones in advance of her, into the thick of which her frail bark was drifting, with the fatal certainty which attends the mariner who has made the first circuit of the fabled Maelstrom. If she could find her soul, if she could learn the secret of its forces, and assume their direction, might she not hope to weather all gales and bring the immortal craft out at length into pacific seas? "To find one's soul," she repeated, "to find one's soul! God teach me what that means, and help me to attain the quest."

At that moment Chester came running in to announce the carriage, and she had only time to clasp her neck-lace and take one last survey of herself before putting on her wraps and going out to join her mother-in-law.

Mrs. Denney was already dressed, waiting only for a touch or two of Lucia's skilful fingers; and very handsome she looked. She was a tall and stately woman.

of sixty-five, wearing her own gray hair puffed under a handsome cap, whose airy falls of lace relieved the otherwise somewhat too solid dignity of her appearance. Her dress for this occasion was a heavy lustrous black silk, fresh and well made; and a costly pin of real jet and gold, which enclosed braided tresses of her husband's and of Cecil's hair, was her only ornament.

"Am I presentable?" she asked, as Lucia swiftly surveyed her attire, and gave a last touch to the poise of the lace cap.

"Dear mother," said Lucia, "you are fit to appear before an empress. I never was so proud of you."

"Well, my daughter," said Mrs. Denney, "I think I can conscientiously return your compliment. But let us hasten. It is nearly five, and we were asked to be early."

Mrs. Van Benschoten met her guests with her most charming grace. Lucia was very glad that the gentlemen had not yet come in. She did not wish to feel Mr. Elms's quiet, observing eye upon her while she gained her first impression of her hostess, or made herself familiar with the sombre splendor of her surroundings. As it was, she had ample leisure to admire this graceful, self-possessed woman of the world, and to possess herself of some of the most salient points of her character. And admire her she did, in spite of all the deprecatory remarks of Mr. Elms.

Hortense Van Benschoten was a woman near fifty years of age. Tall and well-formed, like her brother, she had a squarer brow and more perfectly regular features. Her hair, already gray, was disposed in graceful natural ringlets about her face, and her manners were those of a woman to whom refinement and courtesy

have been a study from infancy. She had naturally great sweetness of temper, combined with a most womanly patience; but behind and above these towered an ambition that was more than feminine. On her brow were deep traces of anxious thought and weary planning in the night-watches to promote the advancement of her family. The heroism which would have made a missionary or a martyr, the courage and capacity which might have regenerated a city, had all been religiously devoted to the service of Mammon. In fact, to serve her family, was to Mrs. Van Benschoten the sum of religious duty. "My home is my sphere," she said; "to train my children to occupy their proper position in society is my mission." And because she had accepted this labor in good conscience, she had grown less hard and selfish than she otherwise might have been; but she was thoroughly worldly, and O, so sadly anxious still! For though Isabel was well established in life, Hector was a constant source of anxiety to her. If he were eligibly married, with a comfortable income, and could be induced to be a shade more steady in his habits, Mrs. Van Benschoten thought that her joy would be full.

"You might do so much for us, Chester," she was wont to say to her brother, "if you would only exert your natural and proper influence over poor Hector. He respects you thoroughly, and if you chose, you could easily gain his sympathy as well. I am sure you might make what you pleased of him."

But Mr. Elms, with his simple habits, could never be made hopeful of winning the sympathy of a man to whom the word pleasure, conveyed the idea of loose women, fast horses, good liquors, and free access to the

gaming table; but as Hortense grew almost to despair of Hector's success in life, her maternal anxiety went out with more and more desperate appeals to her brother; more and more she abased her natural dignity in his presence, in the hope of finally winning him to do something for poor Hector.

Five minutes in her society enlightened Lucia sensibly in regard to what had seemed strange in Mr. Elms's allusion to the coming visit. He knew that an unusually gracious welcome awaited them. He could trust the St. Denis pride in any situation, but Lucia was a thorough Bohemian by nature. Dignity was foreign to her, good-fellowship was her element; but for this once it would please her friend if she were to assume a virtue, since she had it not, and bear herself as the mother of the heir of Elmdale should. In his thought he had made her the equal of Mrs. Van Benschoten in position, and he wished her to maintain an equal front. Since he wished it, it should be so, but the part was not to her liking.

"We had a call, on New Year's," said Mrs. Van Benschoten, after a little, "from your son, my brother's namesake. He is a charming little fellow; I quite fell in love with him."

"Children always appear at their best when they are happy," said Lucia, "and Mr. Elms's kindness delighted him."

"They seem such good comrades!" said Mrs. Van Benschoten. "I am sure I am quite charmed to see that Chester has found a child at last, if only a namesake, upon whom he may bestow some part of his affection. His home life must be very sad."

"*On the contrary,*" said Lucia, with quiet emphasis,

"so far as any one in Ashland can judge, Mr. Elms is almost ideally happy in his domestic relations. Of course, his happiness is not precisely like that of other men, but in its measure I do not think it less."

"Yes, but one must agree that he is fond of children. If Pet Brevoort had been a boy, we should certainly have named him Chester; but Isabel has only girls."

"My son Cecil and Chester were very great friends in their boyhood," said Mrs. Denney, "and it was a sincere pleasure to me when I found that Cecil had named his boy for Mr. Elms; but the fact was never mentioned to him until he found it out for himself."

The entrance of the gentlemen at this moment prevented Mrs. Van Benschoten from pursuing the subject any farther. More and more she was tortured by the thoughts that this quiet widow, with her dangerously pleasing boy, might be gaining an undue ascendancy over Chester.

Mrs. Van Benschoten presented her husband and her son with great cordiality, while Mr. Elms, who came in with them, made his greeting in such a manner that Lucia felt re-enforced. At least, there could be no more quizzing about Chester, since Mr. Elms had arrived. When dinner was announced, the gallant colonel offered Lucia his arm, while Mr. Van Benschoten, a quiet, well-bred man of no very marked characteristics, handed in Mrs. Denney. Lucia found the blonde and burly colonel, with his heavy wit and cordial temper, a great relief after Mrs. Van Benschoten's mildly insinuating inquisition. He knew enough of operas and theatricals to chat about them in an off-hand way, and was even bright enough to appreciate Lucia's discriminating and witty criticism.

"By the way," he said, "since you are fond of music, we must make up a party for the opera this evening. Brevoort has an engagement, I know, but I think Isabel and her box will both be at our service, and Elms will go, too, I am sure."

Lucia looked across the table just in time to catch two brown eyes fixed merrily upon her. Hilarity was working in her veins, and she replied in some soft nonsense, which she took care to utter in a tone so low that it could not possibly reach Mr. Elms's ears.

Mrs. Van Benschoten cordially seconded Hector's plan for the opera.

"Let the young people enjoy themselves, by all means," she said to Mrs. Denney. "You and I will have the quieter chat by ourselves. I want to ask a great many questions about Marion that Chester can never answer. It is delightful to me to know that you and your daughter are her friends, for the dear child would suffer so much, I am sure, from loneliness and monotony, without the sympathy and companionship of her own sex."

Lucia did not allow Colonel Van Benschoten to monopolize her utterly. She had a lively curiosity to observe how Mr. Elms would conduct himself in the society of gentlemen of the world, like Mr. Van Benschoten and his son. Oftentimes it had seemed to her that a character so ideally pure and self-contained as his, must feel itself ill at ease among companions of a less exalted type. But the closest scrutiny revealed to her nothing whatever of inharmony or ill-accord with those about him. If the conversation touched upon business, or politics, or general intelligence, Mr. Elms's opinions were well considered, and received

with marked and genuine respect; and even when society matters were on the tapis, his clear good sense and trenchant strokes of wit or good-humored sarcasm still shone pre-eminent. Lucia was proud of him, with a pride which was dangerously sweet and satisfying.

The gentlemen lingered but a brief space over their wine, and while coffee was being served, Mr. Elms found an opportunity to say to Lucia, —

“If this plan of the opera really pleases you, I will remain and see Mrs. Denney safely to her room, and join you later.”

“Thanks,” said Lucia, adding, a little mischievously, “I am exceedingly pleased. I find that you have slandered your colonel; he not only is not stupid, but he makes himself vastly interesting. He is frank, and, like myself, not too dignified. I am charmed.”

“*Chacun à son goût*,” said Mr. Elms, with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders. “Only have pity upon the youth, I entreat you. Consider what effect the tender passion might have upon his two hundred pounds avoirdupois!”

Mrs. Denney pleaded her years, and her carriage was ordered at an early hour, so that the first act was not yet over when Mr. Elms joined the gay party in Mrs. Brevoort's box at the Academy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE opera was *Martha*. The brilliant scene, the unwonted dazzle, had at first made Lucia's nerves tremble; but the lilting melodies of that most beautiful of all overtures, excited and inspired her; and when the curtain rose, she was thoroughly attuned to the scene and the circumstance. Surely the world of fashion sips the foam of its champagne in a box at the Academy on a *Martha* night. Away with care, away with tragedy; let us have only festal lights, youthful merriment, and the song of the lark and the robin.

Hector, *blasé* of the world of fashion, was really charmed with Lucia's freshness. "She is so wise," he said, "and yet so frank! More innocent than a *débütante*, yet with the finished comprehension of a married woman. One doesn't call her pretty, and yet she delights one."

If Hector was dull of brain, something of the refinement and cultivation of his family still lingered about him.

So it happened that when Mr. Elms noiselessly opened the box door and looked down upon the scene before him, he was struck with a momentary shaft of something like pain. Lucia was leaning back in her chair in the graceful, self-satisfied attitude of a woman who is drinking in unwonted incense of mingled admi-

ration and flattery, while Hector stood leaning over her with more than usual intelligence and vivacity expressed upon his not unhandsome features.

"He admires her," thought Mr. Elms, "and *he* might marry her."

Isabel Brevoort looked up at that moment, and caught the expression of his countenance. It was a revelation to her, and she inwardly thanked whatever deity she owned for having vouchsafed it to her.

"Mamma must know this," she said. "It is time we were all stirring."

She thought all this so quickly, that it left but the shadow of a trace upon her features.

"Ah!" she said, "you have arrived; welcome. But" — this behind her fan — "what do you think of Hector's devotion? Would it be a suitable match?"

Mr. Elms quietly seated himself by her side, biting his lip the while.

"Yes," he said, "quite suitable, if *she* were so to consider it. She is fully Hector's age, I judge; but if all other matters are satisfactorily arranged, that is a trifle."

It was impossible to continue this conversation; but Mrs. Brevoort smiled half incredulously, and tapped her pretty foot to the rhythm of the music.

Isabel Brevoort was, in her way, quite worth knowing. Less exalted in character than her mother, she was finer and more subtle. Her light, airy figure and blonde prettiness had made her a belle in society from the first; but beneath her kitten-like manners there was hidden a great deal of shrewd, worldly wisdom, and a peculiar tact for making the most of whatever good came in her way. She was an adroit tactician,

and could, if it were necessary, breed a little tempest of mischief with the utmost ease and gentleness of manner, and, when the *dénouement* arrived, slip all the trouble off upon the most innocent party involved, and coolly whiten herself to the complexion of a saint. Yet she was amiable in the sense of abhorring all disagreeable things, and society dubbed her that charming angel, and burned much perfumed incense before her shrine. Even Mr. Elms was a good deal under her sway. To be sure, he had been rather too much behind the scenes not to be in some measure disillusioned, for Isabel was a spoiled child at home, and the torment of both father and mother, while between herself and Hector there was always a respectable fraternal quarrel, which might at any moment break out into open hostilities. In one thing only she was agreed with her mamma, and that was the desire to see Hector well established in life; for if things went on as they had been going for the past few years, it was a question if the paternal finances might not suffer shipwreck.

Mrs. Brevoort immediately set about entertaining her relative to the best of her ability; but she soon found that it was a task of more than ordinary difficulty. It was all to no purpose that she pointed out to him his old acquaintances, and recounted their histories, serving out her gossip in that spicy and attractive manner which can usually create the appetite it aims to supply. However he might exert himself, he could not deny that the chit-chat was stale; there were discords in the music; and the glare of the lights, and the heavy perfumes which saturated the air, oppressed his senses, and made him dull. And still the merry game

of small talk and flirtation went on under his eyes with as much vivacity, as little show of flagging, as ever. Would the evening never be over? Would that unending rhythm, that monotonous tum, tum, tum ti tum, of the orchestra never cease?

It was over at length. The curtain had dropped, and Hector was adjusting the opera cloak to his companion's shoulders.

"It has been so brief an evening!" said Lucia; "and I have been infinitely amused."

"I rejoice," replied Mrs. Brevoort; "but I think you brought the charm with you, in your own bright wit and unfailing vivacity."

"Yes, that is it," said Hector. "I see perfectly, this evening, how it is, that to be entertained one must be entertaining."

Mr. Elms looked up surprised. "Why, Hector," he said, "I never gave you credit for so much penetration before. Mrs. Denney seems to be, indeed, a worker of miracles."

"I do not know how it is," whispered Hector, as he tucked Lucia's hand under his arm; "but I think there is no sort of wonder-working of which you might not make me the subject, if you tried."

Lucia was oppressed with a fear that Mr. Elms might have overheard this bright remark, and she became suddenly silent.

When the carriage stopped at the entrance of the hotel, Mr. Elms sprang quickly out, and offered his arm to Lucia. They said not a word ascending the stairs; but when they turned down the long, dim corridor, she asked, —

"Have I filled the *rôle* assigned me in your little drama to your satisfaction?"

"The part was admirably taken," he replied, a little bitterly. "But I can hardly say that it was to my satisfaction."

"Why," she said, looking up to him with frank and honest eyes, "I trust you have not been making yourself absurd."

Her whole manner and accent told how truly it had been but a play to her. The revelation thrilled him, and he stooped quickly and touched his lips to hers in a kiss that lay upon them as light and cool as a rose-leaf.

"Chester," she said, "I did not mean you should ever do that."

"Are you sorry?" he asked.

She could say no other syllable than "no," and he looked down into her eyes with a light in his own which burned its way into her inmost soul.

"Go home, Chester," she said, "and forget, I entreat you, that this thing has ever happened. Remember only that we are friends, and that we cannot wish to bring misery upon each other."

"It is over now," he said, "and I will forget it; but you have hurt me so this evening."

"Not intentionally, I am sure you will believe."

"I do believe it," he said, "and shall sleep the better for this assurance. You are right, Lucia; we must be true friends, steadfast friends. Good night. Sleep sweetly, and dream of me."

For some days after the dinner, Hector betrayed symptoms of lunacy upon the subject of Mrs. Denney; but Isabel, whose society instincts were keenly sensitive, protested.

"She is an impostor," she said. "I'm sure of it. Not only would it be madness in us to cultivate her, but something ought to be done to break up her influence over Chester."

"I fear you are right," said Mrs. Van Benschoten, "for no lady could be so utterly unreserved in manner as she is. I was on the point of being shocked several times during the evening."

"She isn't iron-clad, I own," said Hector; "but I'll be sworn she's true. I know women, and I'll answer for it that there isn't a lie, nor the shadow of a lie, anywhere in her composition."

"If you were right," said Isabel, "it might be so much the worse for Chester. At any rate, something must be done, and, mamma, you must plan it."

"There must be no precipitancy," said Mrs. Van Benschoten; "but if our suspicions are confirmed, I think we should certainly put Marion on her guard. Invalid as she is, she has more power over her husband than any other woman that I know."

Upon which the family council adjourned.

CHAPTER XII.

"ARE we allies?" said Lucia.

"Most certainly we are," replied Mr. Elms.

"And I may require of you some hard service?"

"Indeed you may," he answered, looking up at her with wonderment in his gaze.

Going out early that morning with Chester, to look up some of her old artist friends, Lucia had encountered Mr. Elms, casually, upon the street. He had joined them, and they had spent the morning rambling through studios and picture galleries together. It had been a season of that quiet, rational enjoyment which always drew their souls so near together, and without producing any perturbation of the electrical atmosphere, filled them with a sense of that serene spiritual companionship which is, after all, our highest idea of the bliss of heaven. Reaching the hotel, Lucia had sent Chester on to his grandmamma to announce her coming, while she and her friend turned aside into a small reception-room to finish their chat.

"I am not sure," she went on, laughing, "but you owe this service to me, for I really think you are spoiling mother with this unusual round of feasting and holiday life. It is simply this: the only family that I really care to visit here, is that of Professor Schroeder, *in Brooklyn*. Both he and his wife are old and dear

friends, and their aunt, Madam Bertha Bernstein, is, of all the women whom I ever knew, the dearest to my soul. She is older than I; but I love her like an elder sister. We have already exchanged calls, and now mother, and Chester, and myself are invited to spend a social evening with the family. Mrs. Schroeder is a thorough German, and, though highly accomplished, is extremely simple in dress and manner, and I know that mother, a little unable, perhaps, to forget her old prejudices, and unused, besides, to the German manner of doing things, felt slightly disposed to frown upon the acquaintance. Now, I do not wish to forego my own visit there, and I know that they will feel sincerely hurt if mother does not accompany me. But without your assistance I foresee difficulty."

"And you call that a hard service," he said. "Are those your ideas of friendship?"

"But wait; you have not heard all." She drew in her breath with a comical air, as if re-enforcing herself for a difficulty. "The truth must out," she said, "lest we suffer unexpected shipwreck and disaster. These people are spiritualists; Madam Bernstein is what is called a medium; and in going there one never knows what unearthly thing may happen before the close of the visit. Now, if you should come over for the evening, and the spirits should descend upon us in full force, would you promise to maintain your tranquillity, and exert your influence to keep down the spirit of John Knox, and John Calvin, and Cotton Mather, and the rest, as represented in the person of dear mother?"

He looked up at her with comical questioning eyes, and said, —

"Are you talking sense or nonsense now?"

"I am discussing a simple matter of fact," she said. "I am no spiritualist; and yet I have seen things in that house which I defy any mortal to explain on what are known as natural principles — things, if one were superstitious, to make the hair stand on end, but which these people receive just as calmly as they do their daily dispensation of bread and butter, and to which they manage to pin a faith as simple and sincere as that of the primitive Christians."

"I wish you would describe to me some of these modern miracles," he said, still with a twinkle in his eye.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she said. "I simply ask, Will you go with me, and help me through what may be a trying scene?"

"Will I head a crusade against the invisible world, and agree to put it to flight or be myself overwhelmed? O, yes, very willingly."

"Mr. Elms," she said, beseechingly, "I wish you could see this matter differently. I do not like you to speak of it in that manner. These people are my very dear friends."

"Well, to tell the truth," he said, "I am as anxious to see them as you could desire. The woman who is dearer to you than any other is an object of deep interest to me; but that she should be a medium, does, I confess, jar a little upon my feelings. However, I would not now forego the visit for any price; and as for Mrs. Denney's scruples, I believe I am one of the powers that be with her, and I will undertake her proper management."

"A thousand thanks," said Lucia. "I knew, of

course, that you would feel it a disagreeable thing at first; but if you really will undertake it in your usual frank and sincere manner, I do believe you will not regret it. Although I am not, as I said, a spiritualist, I am glad to be able to judge those who are, without prejudice."

"You are quite right," he said; "and I shall really be glad if there should come to me any experience which should throw light upon what is, doubtless, one of the perplexing questions of the day; nay, of all time; for spiritualism, I take it, is no new thing."

"I wish you could hear Professor Schroeder talk about it," she said. "He is really a charming person, thoroughly educated, according to even a German standard, an enthusiast in science, and the finest, sweetest tempered soul I ever knew, but so unobtrusive that few but those who know him intimately dream of his rare gifts."

"Is it, then, to some enchanted island that you are to conduct me? And you speak of my going as a difficult service to friendship. I feel rather that I ought to chide you for not having sooner made me acquainted with these extraordinary people."

"I cannot tell," she said, "whether you are in joke or in earnest; and indeed, since you are pledged, I scarcely care. The visit is for to-morrow evening. Mother and I will go for an early tea, and since we cannot keep late hours, I hope you will join us by seven o'clock, at the latest."

"You may count upon me, assuredly," he replied. "And I trust you will conspire with your friend, the medium, to procure us an interview with the celestials."

Indeed, I shall be greatly disappointed if they do not favor us."

"It is of no use to conspire with the medium," said Lucia. "The mediums who will so conspire are too often humbugs or charlatans, or, at the least, people whose spiritual associations are not of the highest order. That is the beauty of such manifestations as I have seen through Madam Bernstein. You cannot but feel that her will has nothing whatever to do with the matter. She is simply the transparent lens through which the heavenly vision shines. I wish you could know how thoroughly sweet and lovely she is in herself."

"Indeed," he said, laughing, as he rose to go, "you must not stimulate my curiosity a whit farther. I am dangerously interested already. Be sure I shall not fail you. *Au revoir!*"

Professor Schroeder was a teacher in one of the numerous educational institutes of Brooklyn, and lived in the quiet style suited to his vocation. His house was one of the old-fashioned frame structures still to be found upon the Heights. Its interior, like its exterior, was very plain, so far as architectural decorations go, and its furniture was simple and well worn; yet even Mrs. Denney was forced to admit, as she entered the modest drawing-room, that it was one of the most admirable apartments that she had ever seen. With nothing expensive in it except its books and art treasures, it was yet a paradise of a parlor. Flowers and vines grew all about the windows, with a sense of belonging there. The exquisite statuettes, which stood in niches and upon brackets, though not always of the *most costly* material, were so a part of the very life of

the room that they were inseparable from the idea of it. For it was a room with a personality. It held out its pictures for you as a friend offers a flower or a gem, with love in the act; and the books on its walls and its tables were put there to speak for that silent personality; to tell you what sort of spirit it was which was enshrined in this temple, and proffered you its benison.

Mrs. Schroeder and Madam Bernstein were sitting by an open grate, each with her basket of work, or her trifle of knitting, when the guests entered. The welcome was simple, but cordial, and when it was over, Lucia, used to the proprieties of the place, took out her bit of embroidery, and even Madam Denney was provided with knitting, and they were soon as busy as a sewing society.

Chester found no end of amusement in the birds and the flowers; and presently the little Schroeders, getting over their shyness, brought all their Christmas books and toys and set up a play-house in the corner of the back parlor, and made the picture as true a home scene as one could well imagine.

When Lucia had communicated to Mrs. Schroeder her plan with regard to Mr. Elms, that lady, with true German hospitality, insisted that the 'friend' should be asked to tea. It was upon this pretty scene, therefore, that Mr. Elms entered, when, soon after the lamps were lighted, he made his appearance. He was received with a hearty welcome. Professor Schroeder, a slight, fair man, with a large head and an overhanging brow, was already at home, and the two gentlemen were soon thoroughly engrossed in the discussion of scientific questions, in which both had an interest.

little apart from abstract truth ; the one on the side of Christianity, the other on the side of rationalism. Still, both being true gentlemen, their differences were courteously expressed, and produced no jar whatever in the social atmosphere. Very soon tea was announced. It was a thoroughly German meal, in which solid dishes were interspersed with highly spiced and ornamented cakes and curious confections. The party returned to the drawing-room, and the conversation, though general, was still flavored with science, and offered no loophole, as Mr. Elms had secretly hoped it might, for the introduction of spiritual themes. He had been exerting himself all the evening within the limits of the most studious politeness to form a correct mental estimate of Madam Bernstein. She was a lady of forty, slight and pale, with a face that, never beautiful, bore deep marks of varied and painful experiences. Yet, through it all, there was expressed an insight so deep, a fortitude so sweet and gentle, a patience so long-suffering and kind, that one could but be charmed. Her dress was simple, and rather German, and the white, emaciated hands had evidently known labor, and yet were soft enough to dispense blessings. Her manner was gentle and refined ; yet, now and then, her conversation was characterized by remarks of rare wisdom and profundity. From verge to verge of her atmosphere Mr. Elms could feel nothing that was not sincere and pure.

The evening was well advanced, and Mr. Elms began to fear that nothing unusual would happen, when, without the least *empressement*, Madam Bernstein arose from her seat by the fire, and removed to one which stood near a small cabinet organ, which was

placed across a corner of the room. She did not touch the instrument, — her very garments were swept perfectly clear of it, — but sat quietly, with her hands folded in her lap. The other ladies went on with their occupations, and there was no signal that anything was expected to happen, farther than that Mr. Schroeder drew his remarks on Darwinism to a somewhat abrupt close, and then a little silence ensued.

Immediately thereupon a strain of soft music issued from the organ, as though hands were idly running over the chords. Mr. Elms looked at the key-board, and saw that the keys were depressed as though actually touched.

In the soft hush of the room he heard Chester say to little Bertha Schroeder over their play, —

“Why, who is performing on the organ?”

“It is simply some of aunt Bertha’s friends,” replied the little maiden.

“But there is no one sitting on the music-stool.”

“Undoubtedly there is, only we do not see them. Aunt Bertha’s friends are never seen.”

“Shall we go on with our play? It seems as if they were having church in there.”

“Most certainly we may,” replied Bertha. “Aunt Bertha’s friends are friends of all good children. There is no fear of them whatever.”

By this time the music grew deeper and steadier, and though the strains were still unfamiliar, they were evidently from some well-written score, and were full of pathos and melody. Presently there was a change of key, and then, after a slight prelude, came, clear and full, the notes of the well-known tune to which is sung the hymn “*I would not live away.*” Mr. Elms started

visibly, and listened intent and rapt till the last bars of the tune melted away upon the air. It was followed by strains from the opera of *Martha*. After that came a *Dies Iræ*, played with wonderful power and distinctness, and thrilling every heart with its grand pathos, its unutterable majesty of woe. But gradually this passed into softer strains, and then followed passages of inconceivable sweetness and rapture, melodies which drew tears from the eyes, and made the bosom heave with inexpressible emotions of longing, and aspiration, and prophetic ecstasy. These died away at length in closes full of sweetness, that were echoed and re-echoed in ascending octaves that seemed meant to waft the soul to the very gates of heaven; and then there was silence, and the instrument was at rest.

No one spoke; and after an instant, Madam Bernstein rose, and placing her hand lightly on Mr. Elms's head, repeated, in a soft and low, but somewhat mechanical, voice, these words:—

“To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”

He looked up, tears overflowing from his eyes, and murmured, —

“Dear mother!”

The faint white light which had illumined Madam Bernstein's face faded out of it, and she seated herself again by the fire.

“O,” said Mr. Elms, eagerly, “is that all? It was my mother!”

He rose and stood by the instrument, as if that might still reveal something to him.

Professor Schroeder rose also, and said, —

"It is natural to all, who witness these things for the first time, to wish to examine the conditions of their performance. If you will try the organ, you will find that it does not touch the wall, and that it is perfectly and freely movable. As a scientist, I understand such investigations thoroughly, and should be very glad to have you satisfy yourself that there is no possibility of human agency in the matter."

Mr. Elms made a minute and careful investigation, and found nothing whatever unusual.

"But, after all," he said, "this is not the evidence which is to me most convincing."

"May I be permitted to ask," said Professor Schroeder, "what are your reasons for imagining the agency to be that of your mother?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Elms. "I did not think of my mother until I heard the strains of the hymn, 'I would not live away.' It was her favorite hymn, and one or two slight changes which she made in it to please her own fancy were accurately reproduced by the organ. This certainly impressed me deeply. The purport of what followed, if it had any purport beyond a mere desire to convince, I am not sure that I understand; but when Madam Bernstein placed her hand upon my head, *I knew what words she would say before she uttered them.* They were the last words my mother ever spoke to me; but even this fact was not the crowning evidence; it was that I felt, I *knew*, it was my mother by a concurrence of my intuitive sense with the outward fact, as certain and authoritative as the sense of light striking the eye. Possibly as a rationalist and a scientific man, you, sir, will scorn this asser-

tion; but I assure you it represents truth to me — a truth as vital as my own soul."

Professor Schroeder smiled.

"It is precisely as a rationalist and a scientific man," he said, "that I credit your assertion. I freely confess myself utterly ignorant of the law which governs such a fact; but there is too great a mass of human testimony and human experience behind the fact to be set aside by any sincere or candid man. Science is, as yet, in its cradle. To be sure, the young Hercules has already strangled some tough specimens of serpents, but it is not fairly on its feet yet. To my view, material science is but the means to an end. When we have deciphered and codified all the laws of the material world, we shall be just ready to commence the investigation of spiritual laws; and then, possibly by the aid of manifestations like these, we shall begin to unfold the mysteries of the spiritual world. Then scientific men will be strong enough *not to be afraid to admit* that if the bodily senses may say, 'I know,' and be believed, with a far more serene imperturbability may the soul, from its impregnable fortress, say, 'I know,' and with at least an equal authority."

"You remind me," said Mr. Elms, "of my own impression in reading David Hume's celebrated conclusion concerning theology and metaphysics. He says, you will remember, 'If we take in hand any volume of divinity, or school metaphysics, let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it, then, to the flames, for it can contain *nothing* but sophistry and illusion.' Now, the second

'no' appears to me to be, in many instances, at least unwarranted. The logic may not be always sound; it is a characteristic of human reasoning that it is often defective; nay, I am quite prepared to admit that our theologies are, at this day, in a state almost as unscientific as the systems of astrology and alchemy in the middle ages; but they contained living germs which have since been gloriously evolved. And so I believe that out of our imperfect reasonings concerning those spiritual phenomena, which it is the fashion of many scientific men in our own time to deny altogether, but which, in spite of them, *do still exist*, will hereafter be evolved, by patient labor, A SCIENCE OF THE SOUL, which will be the supreme and crowning achievement of human intelligence, and will open the gate of heaven to every child of humanity, so that it shall at last depend upon his own, free, unfettered will, whether or not he shall attempt to enter. And that is a state which, I think, any one, truly acquainted with the present conditions of human existence, will admit does not now obtain."

"You do not, then, believe in a free heaven?" asked Mr. Schroeder, smiling.

"I believe that now, as in the days of old Prometheus, 'necessity doth confront the universe with an invincible gesture.' I see an infinite pity and love in the Divine Being; but I see only a very finite power of responding to it in the human heart. And it is just at that point that I am unable wholly to deny the old Calvinistic doctrine of human depravity and the alienation of man's will from the divine purpose. It may be proved hereafter that Calvin's reasoning is all wrong;

but his premises certainly exist, and it is for his scorn-ers seriously to address themselves to the task of building a better superstructure upon them. But we are getting away from spiritualism. I wanted to ask you or Madam Bernstein a few questions."

CHAPTER XIII.

"I *BEG* your pardon, Chester," interrupted Madam Denney, "but I should like to ask, before you leave this subject, if I understood you rightly as saying that you did not believe that it was possible for all human beings to be saved? It seems to me that is not quite our orthodox view."

"My meaning is simply this," replied Mr. Elms. "Observation, as well as theology, teaches that God's help to the sinner in the salvation of his soul depends upon the sinner's desire for holiness. Now, I believe it is a matter of fact that thousands of men and women die every year, who came into life so weighted with ancestral depravity, — original sin, if you like, — and so hedged in by circumstances and training, that they never *do*, in their whole lives, have any real sense of what true goodness and holiness are, and are still farther from desiring them. It is a suggestive fact, in a world where Christianity has existed for two thousand years, but I believe it to *be* a fact, and for those people I see no open door to heaven out of this life."

"I believe you speak the truth," said Madam Bernstein; "and that is one reason why I have rejoiced to feel it proved to me, that our probation may extend beyond the confines of the present life. The teaching of Christ, and of the early church, I think, all point in

the direction of a judgment day, which is not to be confounded with the day of one's death; and now we have more modern confirmation of the truth in the revelations of spiritualism."

Madam Denney drew herself up, and looked ill satisfied.

"Well," she said, "I cannot think we need more light than the Bible gives. I was brought up in the orthodox faith, and I believe in that way, and no other."

Madam Bernstein smiled very genially. "It is a good thing," she said, "in this shifting age, to know exactly *what* one believes. But will you permit me to ask, Mr. Elms, whether religion, as you understand it, depends most upon a sense of what is right or holy, or whether it may not be found simply in the capacity for loving? There may be people who are not amenable to any law of goodness; but do you believe that there are those who are not amenable to love?"

"I believe," he said, after a little thought, "that there are those who cannot love God, simply because he is holy; and who cannot love their fellow-men, simply because they worship self, and so are antagonistic to their neighbors."

"Is it so deep as '*cannot*'?" she gently persisted. "Might we not say *do not*, with stricter truth?"

"Yes," he said, "I think you are right there."

"And since a day with God is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, and since, above all, human souls are of such vast account to him as all revelation declares, must we imagine that all his methods are exhausted in our brief lifetime?"

He dropped his eyes for a moment, and then, looking up with a bright smile, answered, —

"I will think of it, madam."

"Then," said Madam Denney to Madam Bernstein, whom she evidently regarded with some curiosity, "you do believe in revelation?"

"Most assuredly, madam. Indeed, I think I am a better believer in revelation than most Christians."

"O, you call this a revelation which we have had this evening."

"It seems to have been of the nature of a revelation to Mr. Elms, since it was something addressed to his soul, which his soul recognized and accepted. But I believe also in a revelation to the race,—a revelation begun in pre-historic times, made prominent through Abraham, continued through Moses and the prophets, greatly expanded and glorified through Christ, and illustrated through various enlightened souls, from his day to our own; and I believe that the Bible, so far as it goes, is a record of this revelation."

"The Bible is the word of God," said Mrs. Denney, with some emphasis; "you certainly do not mean to put it on a level with what are called spiritual manifestations?"

Madam Bernstein hesitated. It is often very difficult to choose language limpid enough to convey the same idea to minds strongly biassed in different directions; and to the gentle soul of Madam Bernstein it seemed that this fact was the cause of much misunderstanding between religionists.

"I do certainly believe in the authority of the Bible, in a certain sense," she said, "over that of modern manifestations. The power for good which it has exercised through so many ages, is a testimonial in its favor which no modern revelation could, from the

nature of the case, produce. Moreover, the character of a greater part of the biblical revelation is in itself so grand and pure, that I think no candid mind can deny that it must have sprung from a very exalted and authoritative source; and yet I doubt very much if, scientifically considered, the *law* of inspiration was at all different, in the early ages, from the law which operates to-day."

"And if you will permit the interruption," said Professor Schroeder, "that is exactly the reason why I, for one, feel anxious, though I trust not unduly so, that the methods of science shall be applied to the investigation of spiritual phenomena. I believe it to be the shortest route to a true settlement of many points at issue between those who only believe upon material evidence and those whose faith is founded upon inspiration."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Elms, "but it grows late, and there are two or three questions which I feel constrained to ask. In the first place, I wish to know, if such manifestations as these we have witnessed to-night are possible and plentiful, why it is that they are not brought before the public, instead of the claptrap and charlatanism which are paraded on our streets?"

"There are several answers to your question," said Professor Schroeder. "Spiritual experiences, using the term in its broadest sense, always conform themselves to individual states of mind or feeling. A backwoods camp-meeting is a different thing, both in form and spirit, I fancy, from the devotions of a soul like John Wesley. The camp-meeting may be held out of doors, and all the world may be invited to it, but John Wesley prays in his closet. So you will always find, I

think, that it is when two or three are gathered together in the name of Truth, that the spirit is most manifestly in the midst. And the inspirations which come to such gatherings *can never be told*. Could you, do you think, write out an account of this evening's experience for the New York Tribune which should do it any justice?"

"Never," said Mr. Elms, impressively. "The public never knew my mother. I could no more describe this evening's experience to it than I could analyze and explain her dying kiss."

"The highest order, then, of spiritual revelations *which are individual in their nature*, are, except within very narrow limits, incommunicable. A *public revelation* may be a different matter; but spiritualism, so far as I know, makes no pretence of founding a new religion. It is only meant to be a means of re-enforcing and developing the old religions. It makes a fresh stand for inspiration as against the claims of materialistic science. And so I think the coming generation will understand it."

"But I still think it such a pity that it cannot be put before the world on a different basis."

"My dear sir, it is that part of the stream which goes over the dam, and runs to waste, which makes the most noise; the deep, strong current which turns the wheel, and sets the machinery in motion, is very quiet. Still, it is worth while to remember, that if there were no noisy stream there would be no quiet mill-race. Spiritualism is doing its work very surely, and quite as swiftly as is consistent with steady progress. In one soul at a time, or two or three, at the most, the fire is being kindled; but it is a fire which

does not easily go out of itself, and which materialism, in all its forms, will find it harder to extinguish than all the old theologies together. To me it is a grand example of the sure working of divine law, that this power should have manifested itself exactly when it was most needed to counterbalance the necessary tendencies of infant science to materialism. Matter first, and then spirit, is the universal law of human development, and we must not expect science to progress in any other order; but meantime inspiration quietly puts in her protest against the resulting materialism of this age, and it stands firm as Luther's theses nailed to the door at Wittenberg; and in due time the world will hear and heed it."

The ladies were by this time making a stir to depart, and Mr. Elms arose, and offering his hand to Professor Schroeder, said, —

"I thank you, sir, most heartily for this evening's hospitality. I shall not soon forget it. I should like very much to feel that this was not to be the last of an acquaintance so pleasantly commenced."

"Nothing would give me more pleasure," said Professor Schroeder, "than to meet you again, and frequently. Do you not sometimes visit New York?"

"Occasionally," replied Mr. Elms.

"Whenever you do, come and see us, with the utmost freedom."

There was a cloud on Mr. Elms's brow, which Lucia saw and understood. She came to the rescue.

"And during some of your vacations," she said, — "perhaps next summer, — I trust you will all make us a visit. You have never seen New England, Professor Schroeder, and you cannot imagine how well it would

repay a visit. My mother's house is large, and we should, of course, claim the privilege of entertaining you; but Mr. Elms lives very near us, and I am sure you would by no means fail of his hospitality also. Is it not so?" she said, looking up into Chester's face.

"Indeed, nothing could delight me more," he said, "than to make our friends welcome to Ashland. And I trust you will not receive this invitation as a mere formality, but accept it as soon as may be."

As Lucia went up stairs, Madam Bernstein quietly drew her friend's arm within her own.

"I have something for you, dear child," she said. "You will heed it — will you not?"

"You know I always heed what you tell me," said Lucia.

"Well, this time it is not wholly a cheering message. There is trouble, deep and dark, in store for you. I see a storm gathering over your head, whose fearful power you do not dream. You will need strength, and courage, and patience. But hold fast. Fear not. 'On every height there lies repose': you will find how true that is. But when the storms have driven you high and dry upon a rocky, ice-bound shore, when you are cut off from every earthly tie, come to me. I shall have direction for you."

"God help me," said Lucia. "Is this inevitable?"

"It is inevitable. Nay, if you could see the end from the beginning, you would, I believe, have courage not to wish to avoid it. The chrysalis must be rent and torn before the Psyche can spread her wings."

"Shall I find my soul?" said Lucia, earnestly.

"You will find your soul, my child, but you will find it in hell."

"But there will be heaven beyond!"

"There *is* heaven beyond, for all who can attain unto it. Persevere, dear child, and that shall be your happy fate."

Lucia knew the changes of her friend's voice so well that she had understood through it all, that the message was from her father; but now Madam Bernstein spoke in her own person.

"You know," she said, "how my own life has been revealed to me beforehand for the past ten years. From these frequent experiences in foresight has come one result that I truly wish I might transfer intact to your consciousness. But that cannot be. You must take it upon my testimony, if you take it at all; but *I know* that all our lives are planned, mapped out for us by an Infinite Wisdom, which sees the end from the beginning; that, however dark or doubtful our course may seem to us, it is never for an instant doubtful to that all-seeing eye. We shall each and all of us *tread the path* he has marked out for us, reluctantly and with fierce rebellion, it may be, but we shall walk it. And if we put our trust in him, and suffer him to guide us, no stone of all the way, no thorn of all that grow beside it, shall pierce our flesh incurably. Remember that, dear friend, and may God help and keep you."

When the good-bys were over, and the little party stepped out upon the street, they were all silent for a moment.

Madam Denney was the first to speak.

"Well," she said, "has not this been a strange evening?"

"A very enjoyable evening, I think," said Mr. Elma.

"Chester," she said, "do you really think that it was your mother's spirit which spoke to you?"

"If by belief you mean clear, intellectual conclusion," he replied, "I might qualify slightly my assent; but if you ask concerning the unreasoning but authoritative voice of intuition, I say most conclusively, I do believe it was my mother."

"That is," said Lucia, "you believe, without being wholly able to satisfy your reason with a cause for your belief."

"Exactly," he replied. "I *know* it was my mother, and yet my reason for saying this is partly an incommunicable one."

"But, Chester," said Madam Denney, "are you not afraid that you will become a spiritualist?"

"Why afraid?" he answered.

"Because they do teach such dreadful doctrines."

"I decided, long ago, never to believe anything which did not comport with reason and sound conscience," he said; "so guarded, I know no reason why one should fear spirits, in the flesh or out of it. I suspect that such doctrines as you allude to are only learned by those people in whose hearts are the germs of them already; and it cannot be denied that people of that ilk are numerous enough among all classes. It is only that those who think they have discovered a new authority, *dare to speak out*. But if these doctrines will not stand the test of human reason and experience, they cannot prevail."

"And if spirits were to inculcate such things in your hearing, you are quite sure it would not affect you," said Madam Denney. "Remember the heart of man is naturally depraved."

Mr. Elms smiled. "Yes," he said, "I know it; "but I trust I have learned one lesson thoroughly by intellectual appreciation, and that is, that no infraction of natural law can ever pay, in the long run. It is a simple fact that the universe was not made on that plan, and the shortest road to happiness is to accept the fact, and abide by it."

"Mr. Elms," said Lucia, "I trust you will not misunderstand me when I tell you that the simplicity of your nature is a constant wonder to me."

"Indeed, I do not misunderstand you. I conceive that you have paid me a high compliment. *Simplex* is the opposite of *duplex*, and from *duplex* comes *duplicity*, one of the most disagreeable words in the language; and there is a sense in which you shall call me simple as often as you please."

"And it is just *that* sense which fits you so admirably. If a thing be right, if it be true, what need of further discussion? Manifestly, none. There is only to accept it, and to be bound by it."

"Was it not a curious commentary upon the state of popular religious sentiment," said Mr. Elms, possibly in order to direct the conversation from himself, "that a social circle of so very limited dimensions should include so many shades of belief?"

"Yes," said Lucia; "I thought of it while you were all discussing religion. There was Professor Schroeder, a rationalist; mother, of stout orthodoxy; yourself—what are you?"

"A rational Christian," said Mr. Elms, smiling.

"Madam Bernstein, a Christian spiritualist, and Mrs. Schroeder and myself unclassified."

"And yet," said Mr. Elms, "we are all tolerably good

people, and I should hope, bound for heaven, only I sometimes wish that our rational friends would make plainer sailing of it, and keep the port more steadily in view."

They had reached the ferry-boat, and Madam Denney and Chester, who, if the truth must be told, were getting sleepy, went inside to warm themselves; but the night being mild and clear, Lucia and Mr. Elms preferred to remain outside.

"I learned to love the river and the bay," she said, "so many years ago, that I never forego a sight of them. I remember coming once to town with my father when I was but a child, and going with him to a promenade concert at Castle Garden, then only beginning to lose its prestige as a place of amusement. How charmed I was with the view from the lovely outside gallery! the soft, shadowy outline of the bay, dotted here and there with craft, whose bright lights grouped themselves like some heavenly constellation alighted on our peaceful waters, and waiting for the dawn to return to their upper habitations; closed in by the Heights, then far greener and more rural in their aspect than now; the low shores of legendary Communipaw, over which the daylight seemed still to linger; the far blue headlands of Staten Island, and the Narrows; and over all the infinite, immeasurable heaven, with all its stars."

"You remind me of old Homer," said Mr. Elms.

" 'When in heaven the stars about the moon
Look beautiful; when all the winds are laid,
And every height comes out, and jutting peak,
And valley, and the immeasurable heavens
Break open to their highest, and all the stars
Shine, and the Shepherd gladdens in his heart.' "

They stood looking over the rail into the deep, dark waters rushing below them, and nothing more was said until the creaking of the boat against the piles, and the rattling of chains, announced their arrival.

"Dear friend," said Mr. Elms, as he drew her hand within his arm, "I shall always thank you for this evening's enjoyment. You do not know what it is to me to feel certain that my mother lives and watches over me, to know if I am true."

At this moment they joined Madam Denney and Chester, and going off the boat, took a South Ferry stage, which landed them at their own door.

CHAPTER XIV.

MADAM DENNEY's business was getting itself transacted slowly, but quite to her mind. Already the wisdom of Mr. Elms's advice was apparent, and she felt herself richer by some thousands of dollars than when she left home. This fact kept her in good spirits; but all their various commissions being nearly executed, the time drew near when it would be necessary for the party to leave town.

"There is nothing left upon my list," said Madam Denney, at one of their morning consultations, "but to visit my dear old friend, Mrs. Bogart. I must spend one day with her, and then I am ready to go home."

"Very well," said Mr. Elms; "if that visit can be arranged for to-morrow, we might, I think, take our departure on the day after."

This plan pleased Madam Denney, and Mr. Elms, having settled all the details of it, said to Lucia, —

"That will leave you at liberty for the very evening upon which I desire your company. I know that you enjoy a fine dramatic performance, as well as myself; and for once in a lifetime you must see a woman enact tragedy. There is but one Lady Macbeth in the world at this time; and since this mighty star is now for a brief time visible in our heavens, I cannot allow you to fail of catching a beam of her glory."

"It is the thing of all others that I desire," said Lucia. "It will fitly crown our holiday. Was there ever another visit, do you think, so delightful as this has been?"

He smiled radiantly, pleased with her simple and innocent delight.

The morning was mild but cloudy, and soon after lunch Madam Denney and Chester set out to pass the day with Mrs. Bogart. Lucia dined alone, and returning to her room, had a half hour to herself before Mr. Elms knocked at her door.

"I meant to be early," he said, as he entered, "because on such an occasion I dislike all hurry. I would have my mind tranquil and receptive, that I may take in to the utmost every wave and tremor of that magnetic tide, which it is the prerogative of genius to set in motion."

She was ready in ten minutes; and as he helped her to arrange the soft, white cloud about her face, which was to protect her from the midnight cold, he looked down into her eyes with a smile of sweet and friendly admiration.

"For a woman who makes no boast of beauty," he said, "you have some wondrous ways of captivating the eye. I am proud of you this evening."

"I would not mind your flattery," she said, "if it did not work mischief in my too susceptible brain. I am actually learning to care for dress, since I find there is a magic in it to call smiles to your eyes. Beware how you make me vain — me, who depend upon simplicity for all my charms."

He arched his eyebrows, and laughed outright.

"Lucia," he said, "I never caught you in one of the

tricks of your sex before. That jest might take the solemn edge off all this evening's tragedy."

And in his merriest mood he drew her hand within his arm, and they set forth. It was beginning already to snow; so, though they had designed to walk, Mr. Elms thought it better to call a carriage, by which means they were even earlier than they intended, reaching their seats just as the orchestra were tuning their instruments. The music was better than is common, and seemed to perform just the office for which it was intended; namely, to dispel the outer world, to harmonize the mind, to place the soul in a condition of true receptivity — that condition without which, on the part of an audience, genius itself is powerless.

The curtain rose, the opening scene glided by, and GENIUS appeared upon the stage. A woman past maturity, yet, by the magic of a mighty gift, holding age and all its terrors at defiance, arrayed in dark habiliments, copied from the costumes of the old Greek chorus, and which lent a gloomy grandeur to her presence, from the first moment the fierce passion of an untamed soul pervaded not only every fibre of her person, but every thread of her vesture. From the core of her being to the outermost selvage of her robe, the figure was instinct with craving life. Scene after scene rolled on, and thick-coming crimes smote through her consciousness, and shook her quivering soul with horror and remorse, throttling even her womanhood, as now and then it looked and smiled, or tried to smile, upon her lord. It seemed to Lucia that gradually not only all tender and human emotions, but flesh and blood itself, and queen-like drapery, were alike dissolved, consumed, in that intense and fiery glow. The

actress was gone, with her robes; there was not a trace left of her whose name appeared upon the bills; but up and down that shadow-haunted stage there stalked in naked supremacy a mighty soul, full of fell purposes, and stained with horrid crimes, yet human to the core; torn by the strong spell of genius out of its mouldering sepulchre, out of its bloody niche in the dark, historic past, and brought with all its tragic atmosphere about it, to testify in a voice fit to curdle the blood, — the voice of a universe poured through one living throat, — that crime is ever its own avenger. God punishes not, say they? Let this Macbeth reply!

A spell was over the whole house that night, of which none drank deeper than Lucia and her friend. The sleep-walking scene came on; the haunted woman, in ghost-like robes, was gliding about the stage, uttering those plaintive, murmuring tones; caressing, with dishevelled tresses, that "little hand;" the womanhood of her all undone and crucified, the short-lived gust of passion spent, and all the triumphs which it clutched dissolved in air.

Mr. Elms's lips were set, and his eyes were glistening. Lucia's bosom was heaving with emotion. There was no help for it; neither of them knew how it happened; but somewhere in the middle of that surpassing scene their hands met and held each other in an indissoluble clasp.

It was over at length; the tortured, restless spirit wandered away into the night, and these two looked each other in the face. No word was spoken, but a long, deep sigh fluttered out from the heart of each.

The curtain fell, and they went out. The storm had grown fierce, and the winds were whistling about the

street corners, and the snow and sleet drove blindly in their faces.

"What a night for mother to be out in!" said Lucia.
"How will she get home?"

"If we do not find her at the hotel," said Mr. Elms, "I will go for her."

Reaching the room, however, a note awaited them, saying that as the storm was so wild, Mrs. Denney would not attempt to return, but would remain with her friend over night.

"It is better so," said Lucia. "Mother is getting weary with all this unusual excitement, and a hard cold would make her really ill, I think."

"Yes, it is better so," said Mr. Elms.

Lucia was sitting under the chandelier in the light of the open fire, the glow of deep feeling not yet wholly faded from her face. Mr. Elms, looking at her, thought he had never seen her more attractive.

He drew a chair opposite hers, and sat down; they talked of the play, of that wonderful genius which had so informed it with vitality and power, and of genius in the abstract; and then the conversation fell into pauses. The storm hurtled without against the window panes, and within the gas gleamed and the firelight shone, and Lucia's eyes were beaming softly through their lashes with feeling half hidden, half revealed, and her bosom rose and fell responsive to the play of thought and fancy in her brain.

Mr. Elms rose as if to go, but lingered, neither going nor staying.

"Lucia," he said, "it was never so hard to leave you before."

"And it was never before so certain that you must go," she answered.

The storm, which had been gathering all the evening, broke then.

"Why must I go," he said, "when I so much want to stay? Why must the universe build itself up into a barrier between you and me? Would not inexorable law sleep for one hour, do you think?"

He ceased speaking, but his thought went on. "Why may not simple Nature have her will? Why must Macbeth's prevision be so true? Why may not the deed be done when 'tis done? Why must all the spirits of the air conspire against a trammeling up of consequences, and weave from one secret, undiscovered wrong a spell *forever* to embitter her peace and mine?"

He was walking up and down the apartment with lion-like strides. Lucia's brain whirled, but she managed to say, —

"Whenever I begin to rebel because things I crave cannot be mine, I have one formula for quelling the revolt. Do you know what it is?"

"I cannot guess," he said, bitterly.

"I remember, to quote a philosopher of the people, that 'what we don't get in this world wasn't meant for us.' Of the infinite number of God's good gifts, not all can fall to any one soul's lot. And some things are so utterly beyond our reach, that it is madness and folly to cry for them."

"Lucia," he said, "you are no weakling; your nature is strong enough to need a curb. It is your force, your vitality, the passion of your soul, which is strong enough to sway me in spite both of reason and con-

science ; but you have had your day. Wifehood and motherhood are open secrets to you, while I — ”

“ While you, dear Chester,” she interrupted him, “ are left for a season to be a revelation out of God’s heaven of what a man may be, who can have the strength and courage to walk without faltering by the law of Right. I tell you, Chester, if you could see yourself as I see you, you would be content to wait God’s time. Ay, content and thankful.”

“ Ah, Lucia,” he said, “ you sit serene in your calm womanhood and praise me, but you know little of the storms that sometimes shake my soul. Do you think I can live on from year to year, and not long to be a man like other men ? Do you think I can read poetry, — I *never* read romances, — but do you think I can read poetry, the best and purest, — Milton, Tennyson, Browning, Longfellow, a play of Shakespeare, nay, even this *Macbeth*, — and not feel my incompleteness cast into my face ? not feel that life is passing away, and I am losing its truest fruition, its culminating joy ? Do you think that I can look at you, sitting there so sweet and coy, — you, with your rippling hair, your beaming eyes, your liquid, murmuring voice, your full, true, earnest soul, — and not feel my pulses stir to madness ? Nay, lift not up to me your sad, beseeching face. I am master of myself, in spite of this whirlwind. You never wilfully tempted me, as others have, and never will ; and it is because of that, — because you sit thus sphered in a purity like that of the dawn before the first red day-beam ripples its pellucid peace, — it is therefore that my soul longs for you. Such love as I could offer you to-night would be no insult, but a sacramental gift. I want you, Lucia, I want you.”

"Would you pay the price of wrong-doing, Chester?"

Her voice was cool and steady; he could not guess that her veins were throbbing.

He walked up and down the room in silence. The storm still dashed against the casement; the fire burned with a smothered force in the grate, and Lucia heard the ticking of the watch in her belt.

He came at last and knelt down by her side. Looking into his eyes, she knew that he had conquered.

With a quiet smile he approached his lips to hers, and said, —

"Would it be an irreparable injury to any one, do you think?"

"To no one so much as to ourselves, Chester."

"Yes, I know what you mean; but give me one kiss to help me over this, the hour of my temptation, and hereafter I will be strong for both of us."

"Will you promise me that?"

"Yes, Lucia, I promise."

She stooped her head, and her lips met his in one long, soulful kiss, which was to him a revelation of undreamed-of things.

He sprang to his feet, his eyes gleaming.

"You did well to make me promise," he said. "What between you and Marion I am bound hand and foot with promises. And yet it is neither for your sake, nor for Marion's sake, so much as for truth's sake, that I accept my fate. 'What I would highly, that would I holily.' Will truth ever reward me, do you think?"

"Truth is an ever-present reward," she answered;

"but this I know, Chester: God will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. In his own good time he will remember you."

She had risen, as a signal that he should go, and he stood with his hands upon her shoulder, looking down into her eyes.

"O, I am glad, so glad," he said, "that we are still true friends. There must *never* come between us anything that is not pure and peaceful as your eyes are at this moment. I will be true to my promise," he said; "if need be, I will be strong for two."

"My *cœur de lion*," she murmured softly; "God bless and keep you!"

"I love to think," she added, "that not all women would be able to walk these breezy heights with you. I believe I never thanked God for his strong help before in my life as I do this moment."

"And when all is said and done, Lucia, I thank him that I know no lower walks of love than these. High and low, good and evil, are such strange, variable measures. For instance, the highest place which love can reach, it seems to me, is one of rightful subserviency to truth and duty. But place it there, 'it puts its hand out in a dream, and straight outreaches all things.'"

"O, Chester, Chester," she said, "the innate strength and purity of your soul are an ever-growing wonder to me. Why did God make just one such man, and never any more?"

He looked down with deep, exceeding joy into her eyes.

"For the same reason, I fancy, that he never made another woman like you. But that is no secret," he

added, with that playfulness of soul which no deepest surge of feeling could wholly tame. "You are just to comfort me."

"What arrogance!" she answered, laughing; and with one strong pressure of the hand he was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. ELMS was thoroughly accustomed to banish all the trials and perplexities of the outer world from his wife's apartment; he persistently attuned his nature to the key of hers, when in her presence; and as if Providence were determined to aid him in this, the crisis of his fate, — and Providence usually determines to help those who help themselves and trust in God, — he found a joyful surprise awaiting him upon his return. Marion was sitting up to receive him.

"How well you look, dear!" she said, as her husband stooped to kiss her. "You have been enjoying yourself."

"Yes," he said; "it has been a whirl of pleasure ever since I left home, and yet I am glad to be here again. The best place, after all, for me, dear, Marion, is at your side. And this surprise which you have plotted for me is charming. Why, we shall have you cured yet before we know it."

She smiled radiantly. "Ah, Chester," she said, with tremulous earnestness in her voice, "I want to be your wife, your companion, in all joys; a solace and help to you, instead of the drag and the kill-joy that I am."

"Marion," he said, very earnestly, "I beg you never to say such words again. Why, the surprise you have *given me this evening* has thrilled me through and

through with a joy such as not all the gay society I have met within these last two weeks could afford. If you could be cured, I think there would be no prayer left with which I could beseech the throne of grace; and yet, if it be not God's will, I will not murmur."

She folded him tenderly in her arms, and their two hearts beat against each other in a prayerful silence.

"But," she said, "I must not sadden you. I meant that you should find me only a comfort and an inspiration this evening. I wanted to be beautiful in your eyes, to give you, indeed, a joyous welcome on your return, after the longest absence of our married life."

"Beautiful!" he said; "I have seen no woman in all New York who was half so fair. An angel out of heaven, my Marion, might shrink from a comparison with your charms; and yet your beauty is the least of your attractions."

She was indeed charming. Determined not to receive her husband in bed, she had that afternoon made Janet dress her, and, with Norah's aid, lift her into a handsome arm-chair; and in this she had been wheeled to a place before the open fire, and then, with her helpless feet resting comfortably upon a hassock, and a little glow of excitement in her cheek, a stranger would never have dreamed that she was an invalid at all. She wore a *bourous* of white cashmere lined with silk of palest blue, and trimmed with swan's down. Her heavy golden hair was wound in a graceful coil about her head, and ornamented with natural flowers, while a trailing spray of smilax fell negligently over her shoulders.

"And what have you brought me?" she said, as he

seated himself beside her and kissed her beautiful hand. "Where is my New Year's gift?"

"O," he answered, with a feigned indifference, which his merry eye belied, "there is a trunk full of embroideries, and a half dozen new books, and a little gem of a painting—a perfect color poem; you shall see them all in the morning. That will do—will it not?"

"Yes, it will do for *those*," she said; "but they are not my New Year's gift. Those are things of general import. There is something for *me*, I know."

"Well, but I should say the needle-work elegancies were for you, and you only; and the little picture I designed to fill just that nook yonder, which offends your eye."

"Ah, you gay deceiver," she said, laughing, "you cannot blind my eyes. I know there is something hidden away somewhere,—in the breast-pocket of your coat I suspect,—that is for me."

"What little bird whispered you a tale like that?" he said, incredulously.

"I shall never tell you its name," she answered; "but it is a little bird which lives in my heart, and keeps me well acquainted with all your doings. Don't fancy, because I sit here in this room, and never move outside of it, that I do not know what is going on in the great world. Why, I am as travelled and as wise as 'the lassie who rode on the north wind back to the castle that is east of the sun and west of the moon.'"

Mr. Elms blushed a little, and looked at her inquiringly. She enjoyed his confusion.

"Ah," she said, "but I do not think it worth while to make mention of all I know. If one has a husband

who loves, and is true to one, that is enough. And now, loiterer, for my gift."

"You shall search my pockets," he said, "and see if you can find it, you spoiled child."

So bidden, she made small pretence of searching, but went straight to the breast-pocket of his coat, and drew from thence a queer, irregular package, done up in tissue paper.

"Enchantress," he said, "by what divination were you guided?"

"O, the little bird that lives in my heart told me," she answered, as she deftly untied the string and unfolded the wrappings which he had placed there purposely, that he might enjoy her pretty display of impatience and curiosity. They were dissipated at last, and then there was a shagreen case. She tried its spring, but it was locked.

"*Méchant!*" she said; "give me quickly the key from your porte-monnaie."

"But the key is not in my porte-monnaie. I think I must have left it on my bureau at Hortense's; or may be it is in my trunk, and will come to light in the unpacking."

"No, it is not in your trunk," she said. "Ah, I see; I must search for it. It is in your left vest-pocket. There! did I not tell you?" and she drew it forth in triumph.

The case was unlocked, and then there lay before her eyes a sight which brightened them to their very depths.

"Sapphires!" she said! "and so exquisite! Chester, when am I to wear them?"

"When you are well, love."

"O, Chester, darling, then you have faith. Beauti-

ful, beautiful sapphires, that come to tell me that! Dear heart, I will be well."

She kissed him again and again, and till tears shone in his happy eyes.

The tea bell rang, but Mr. Elms was not inclined to heed it. This pretty childish play stirred his fancy without awakening any very deep emotion, and for the moment he found it a relief.

"Ah," she said, joyously, "you do not know that I am going out to tea with you. You are to wheel me in the chair, and I am to pour the tea."

He looked incredulous. "Ring that bell, please, and you shall see. Janet and I have rehearsed it all."

"Well, then," he said, "if that is so, you shall wear the sapphires." And he fastened them all in their places — pin, and earrings, and bracelets. "There, now," he said, "you are gorgeous! How they become you! They light up your pale beauty till you look like a mid-summer night's dream."

Janet had entered, and now Mr. Elms wheeled his wife to the table, while Janet stood behind her chair. The service, though simple, was elegant, and the feast fit for a fairy revel.

"You must have ordered this tea yourself," he said.

"Certainly I did," she replied. "I am to be your housekeeper hereafter."

He looked a little grave, but said nothing. He spent the evening with her, chatting about Hortense and her family; but when she was in bed for the night, he went out and found Janet.

"Janet," he said, "how does this change commend itself to your judgment?"

She hesitated for a moment. "It makes Mrs. Elms very happy," she said, at length.

"But has she really the strength necessary for such undertakings?"

"I cannot tell," said Janet, candidly; "she seems almost inspired in her determination to get well."

"But why has it come about so suddenly?" he asked. "I cannot see that she has been really improving recently. She seems, physically, much as she has been for a year past."

Janet looked at him penetratingly. He was really at fault.

"Tell me what you think," he said.

"Mr. Elms," said the discreet Janet, "some stories are very old. This one dates back as far as Abraham's tent, I should say. I know not if there be a thought of Hagar in the case, but I am sure that the lad Ishmael dwells not far from us."

Mr. Elms's brow clouded, and without another word he entered his bed-room and shut the door. For ten minutes he was absorbed in thought. Then he went and stood by his window, and looked across to one from which a light gleamed. Lucia was sitting by her lamp mending a pair of pantaloons for Chester — sewing on a button; he could see by the way she pulled out her thread. While he looked, she came and closed the blinds and drew down the curtain.

No sleep visited Mr. Elms's pillow that night. All the evening, as he had received and responded to his wife's affection, he had asked himself, "Am I a hypocrite? Am I a deceiver?" And always his soul had repelled the accusation. The calm and tender affection, which was all that his married life warranted, was just

as steady and just as true as it had ever been. It was only that a newer and stronger element had entered into his life than it had ever known before. The passion of his nature was thrilled into consciousness by Lucia's presence, as in his blamelessness he had never before dreamed that it could be. Reviewing all the events of the last few months, in the silent watches of that night, his position came at last to be very clear to him. He loved two women—the one with a tender and true devotion, which only death could interrupt, the other passionately and with all his soul. Must he forego the dear delight of Lucia's society, and still, in the face of this new temptation, make the old life suffice him? It was not easy to say 'yes' to that proposition. A hard battle had first to be fought with the strong and untried forces of his nature; but he never doubted for an instant that in the end it must be said. As he wrestled with his passion, he found in that very struggle the most eloquent vindication of the marriage law. He saw how easily were its restraints removed, love might become license, and the very foundations of human life be shaken. If ever humanity shall attain a stage of development where it may be trusted to be a law unto itself, it must be through having first obeyed the prescribed law of God. License means anarchy, but obedience leads to freedom. He saw that, and was man enough to abide by it.

But Lucia! Ah, that thought pierced him.

Her soul was sympathetic and self-forgetting. He had felt the clinging nature of her love, and he knew, as by instinct, how hard it might become to withdraw himself utterly from the region of passionate attraction, and teach both their hearts to be content with simple *friendship*. He had a glimmering of a fact which Lucia

felt in its full force. In that moment when he had conquered himself, he had made it impossible that she should not adore him. The act transfigured itself before her eyes into something godlike, and, not yet strong enough to emulate, she worshipped it. That she must suffer pain, he knew and lamented. If she should betray weakness, he would not be surprised. But he had promised to be strong for two, and in that moment he felt that the truest chivalry is that of a man who, having unwittingly won a woman's love, shields her, at the cost of his own happiness, from the untoward consequences.

"She loves me," he said, "and by that love I may lead her whithersoever I will. God take our two hands in his, and draw us into his very presence."

And with that prayer upon his lips, that aspiration in his heart, in the early dawning he fell into a quiet slumber.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOR the next three weeks Mr. Elms devoted himself to business with an assiduity refreshing to behold ; and if the truth must be told, those were three long and dreary weeks to Lucia. Chester did, indeed, manage to be a good deal with his namesake, and through him Lucia contrived to learn that Mr. Elms was truly much occupied. It was, in reality, not more the missing him which pained her, than the knowledge that she could so miss a man upon whom she not only had no personal claims, but who was, in fact, pledged wholly to another. Lucia was experienced enough to know what wonders may be wrought by propinquity and sympathy working in concert with natural tendencies. A score of times she had seen such attractions result in marriage, and after unhappiness ; as many times, too, she had known them rise to fever heat, and then naturally and spontaneously die away, and leave no trace behind. She had, therefore, little faith in the immortality of any passion which was not founded upon eternal principles. But Lucia had a rare faculty of critical self-analysis. She knew that the attraction which Mr. Elms exerted over her was not dependent upon his external graces. He was, indeed, a soul "all whose acts were regal, graceful, and pleasant as roses ;" but below this outward charm of man-

ner was a "sylvan strength and integrity of character" which was the sure rock to which her soul would fain anchor itself. If she were to love him at all, it would be, not because he ministered to the selfishness of her nature, but because by his shining example he constantly drew her out of herself, beckoned her forever to nobler heights of doing and daring, to rarer atmospheres, where the vision of heavenly achievement was clear and prophetic. His very self-command was a challenge to her—a challenge, which, in her inmost soul, she knew she must accept, or prove herself forever unworthy of him. Could she walk side by side with him through the coming years, be his friend, suffer him to share her care and tenderness for her child, lay the burdens of her life upon his shoulders, and in return minister to him unmeasured sympathy and helpfulness, without ever betraying human weakness or folly? To look ahead thus, dazed her. "One day at a time," she said to herself. "Let me gather strength for to-day, and the morrow shall take care of itself. O, if I had but business to occupy me, as he has, I would try to show him that there is strength in me yet. To sit here at home with nothing else to do but pine,—that is a temptation and a misery." She got books, and read, not poetry or romance, but history, philosophy, science. She took long walks over the bleak, snow-covered hills; she made a friend of nature, and poured out all her secrets to the winds, the clouds, the stars, and needed no other confidant.

It was Madam Denney's custom once every winter to give a grand dinner party. Coming home from New York in that pleasurable glow of excitement which contact with the world evolves from strong

natures who live in seclusion, she determined to exercise this hospitality at once. She was full of ideas, to which she wished to give vent. She had some pride, besides, in being able just now, in point of style, to lead the little *coterie* to which she belonged; also she really wanted to exhibit Lucia in festal attire, and show the great world of Ashland that her daughter-in-law was, after all, not unworthy of the honor of belonging to her family. So the dinner-party was determined upon.

"I shall certainly invite Mr. Elms," she said to Lucia; "and I do hope he may be prevailed upon, for once, to break over his habit, and come."

Accordingly, Mrs. Denney delivered the invitation in person. Mr. Elms looked very grave, and couched his refusal in words as gracious and considerate as might be.

"Another year, Mrs. Denney," he said, "perhaps my wife will be well enough to accompany me. I will wait till then."

But Mr. Elms was not altogether easy in his mind. He wanted to see Lucia, wanted in some way to make her understand that in avoiding her he was not actuated by caprice. On the morning of the dinner, therefore, while Lucia was busy dusting and putting to rights the parlor, Mr. Elms ran up the steps with a basket of flowers in his hand. The windows were open, and he nodded to her through them, and entered without ringing. Mrs. Denney was busy in the kitchen, and Lucia was quite alone.

"I have watched for this opportunity," he said. "It is long since we have had a chat together."

She looked up from her admiration of the flowers,

touched almost to trembling by the winning earnestness of his voice. There was a tender beam in her eyes, which affected him like a reproach; but a reproach from her always thrilled him with joy, for it was a true token of her affection.

"You have not felt yourself neglected, I trust," he said, with a laughing glimmer in his eye. "You have remembered that I had other ties."

"A wife, for instance, and a business that is most exacting. Yes," she said, "I have remembered it all."

"Do you know how fast Marion is improving? She sits at the tea table with me every evening now. If I could forget the scientific facts of the case, I should be tempted to hope that she might be restored to health."

His tones, his bright glances, the strong, vital charm of his manner, were working their accustomed magic in her heart. Strive as she would, she could not wholly resist it.

"You ask congratulations," she said, "and if I could have faith, I would congratulate you. I am not so selfish that I should not rejoice to see you happy —"

"But, Lucia," he said, "I am happy. If God shall please to grant my utmost prayer, he will give me strength to bear with composure the great joy of it; but if not, I am content."

"Do you not know, my friend," she said, "that the very strength with which you curb your nature, rein in, with strong, defiant hand, its natural impulses, incites me to wish for you, more and more, that you may know the full joy and satisfaction of a love that is equal, and responsive, and free. This that your life cherishes is not love."

"Dear friend, it is what God gives me to stand in the place of love. To whom presents he the round and perfect gift? Shall I, a worm, quarrel with my life because it has no wings? Rather let me patiently wait till God sends wings."

"And bear the pain without a cry?"

"Pain is the sign of weakness. Silence gives strength, and the soul of silence is always God."

"Chester Elms," she said, "you are like no soul I ever knew before, and yet, strange marvel! you are not strange to me. So pure and perfect are all your attitudes, that any true soul recognizes in them, instinctively, just simple, concrete truth; and to no soul born of the Infinite can truth be a stranger."

"Lucia," he said, very seriously, "nothing surmounts my pride but your appreciation. Your praise always humbles me. You see me through a halo."

"I do," she said, impetuously; "in my eyes you are heroic, grand. When I see the yawning gulf there is in your life, I could cast myself into it, and be forever extinguished, if, by so doing, I could make your destiny one whit more worthy of you. And yet you would not accept from me this poor crimson leaf of bittersweet which has fallen hap-hazard among your flowers."

"Intrepid soul!" he murmured; and then, with a bright look into her eyes, "No, I accept the bitter-sweet, and assure you, besides, that this sweet and pure companionship is far more to me than you can dream." With a light laugh, he added, "You forebode evil and sadness for me, and yet, all the while, with voice and eyes you dissipate the cloud with which you threaten me. I shall never be lonely so long as I have you. But have I done what I meant to do to-day — ~~taken away~~"

from your heart the feeling which my rash impulses left there one night, I know? I weakly threw my burden upon you then, and I have thought since how your gentle heart would pain itself through sympathy. Promise me to forget all that, and only to remember that I am happy now with the promise of a still greater joy just brightening my horizon."

"I cannot promise you aught," she said, "but that I shall always be your friend, and always strive to be worthy of your friendship. If I can reach that high ideal, it will be well with both of us."

He held her hands in his for a moment. "Whatever happens, Lucia," he said, "never imagine that I have forgotten you. *I shall not forget.*"

And then, as Chester's voice was heard in the hall, he called to him to come and ride down to the mills, and the two went off together.

Lucia stood for some minutes lost in thought. When first the young sun paused in his advance, and the primeval earth grew conscious that her great lord was withdrawing himself from her, did she shudder and grow chill through all her being? Did some faint foreboding warn her of the coming change; of frost and snow, of ice-bound streams, of death-like rigors, that should strike through her very vitals, and congeal the life-current in all her veins? and did the monarch, ere he shrank into distance, and turned his looks afar, whisper, with pitying tenderness, "*I shall not forget*"?

Lucia felt the chilly premonition. Would her orb ever return to bless her, or must she henceforth shiver in the cold?

CHAPTER XVII.

"A LETTER for you, ma'am," said Janet, as Norah brought in the morning mail.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Elms, as she looked at the post-mark, and deliberately broke the seal.

It was from Mrs. Brevoort — the result of family councils. It opened innocently enough, but this was the medicated paragraph: —

"We enjoyed the visit of your friends, the Denneys, exceedingly. How charming the little widow is! Hector quite fell in love with her, and at one time I thought hostilities between him and Chester imminent. No woman but yourself, Marion, would trust her husband in such dangerous proximity. But we all know your faith in Chester. However, if you are not jealous of Mrs. Denney, I am jealous of her son. How Chester dotes on him! I wish he loved my children half as well. And he *is* a bright boy, though I shall never forgive him for spoiling my little Arabian mare with letting her run in the Park. It was all Chester's fault; he was so proud of the boy's horsemanship that he urged him on to display it; but I have never ridden Wild Madge in peace since.

"Mamma sends love, and is very glad you have such pleasant neighbors; only she says you must remember Mr. Weller's advice."

Marion read the letter through, and paused. Then she read it over again deliberately, that she might make no mistake in its meaning. Then, gathering it all up, and putting it into its envelope, she held it by one corner to Janet, saying, with cool and steady tones,—

“Janet, drop that into the grate, and oblige me by never mentioning it again.”

“So perish calumny,” she said to herself; and then she turned over upon her pillow, and, closing her eyes, lay silent for a long time.

And yet the letter had not failed to do its work. Though Mr. Elms never knew that his wife received it, its influence imparted an icy edge to her demeanor towards Lucia which made it impossible for them to meet upon any other footing than that of the most stately civility. So Lucia staid at home, and taught her boy, and read philosophy; Descartes, and Kant, and Herbert Spencer, and even dropped into Darwin, in a friendly way. Now and then she met Mr. Elms for a moment, and always he was kind and true. Numberless little attentions, too, mostly offered through Chester, reminded her that he had not yet forgotten; but, on the whole, it seemed to her a chill and dreary time. But she was too just and too unselfish to make complaint. It was all as it should be; only her sun was clouded.

With the opening spring came a few weeks of bright reprieve. Her garden work must be begun again, and gardening was common ground between them. Again they met for little *tête-à-têtes* across the bittersweet wall. During the preceding season, Mr. Elms had built a small green-house, which stood by itself upon

the lower terrace, and Lucia found occupation for many pleasant half hours in going through it, and selecting such plants as she needed for her own beds, and learning the habits of others which were too delicate to be removed.

And for all the silence which had lain between them, she found her friend unchanged; still watchful and tender, still steady, kind, and true. She almost dreamed that the summer time was coming; that her sun was returning; that all the birds would sing again, and every spray be full of promise.

And did she wish it? you ask, stern reader. Plainly, then, I think there were moments when she did. I have not promised you, from the first, a faultless heroine. There are women enough among your acquaintances—all honor to them—who are never drawn away into uncertain latitudes through overmuch of sympathy or feeling. I have not cared to show you such an one. Rather I have preferred to turn inside out for you the living, throbbing heart of a woman strong enough in a woman's noblest strength—the strength of the affections—to need the curb of actual self-knowledge before she can stand in trustful content behind the social pale. But if you will patiently follow me, I will try to show you, also, how out of even such depths a woman may, through dear-bought knowledge and God's loving chastisements, rise to strong heights of purity and self-control, and be able at last to bring to the man she loves a dowry of something fully as sweet and satisfying as much of the fruit, well-cried in the markets, which never sunned itself outside the husks of conventional proprieties.

It was a rosy June evening; the air was full of dew

and fragrance; the sapphire sky was lucent as a gem, and its golden rim was like a gate of promise to the longing soul. Lucia was loitering among her flowers, and at last, feeling averse to turn her back upon this rare mood of mother Nature, she stood under the shadow of the drooping elm, and leaned over the bitersweet wall. She heard a footstep near her, and knew whose it was; but her spirit was so calm, that not a pulse beat faster. His presence was to her only the glow, and the grandeur, and the fragrance of the evening, incarnated. He approached the wall, and, instead of stopping, as she had expected, upon the farther side, sprang over it. Then, first, some instinct sounded a warning note.

"Good evening," he said; "this is just what I have wished all day. What a lovely spot this is, when Nature does her best by it! This green hollow, with its shining pond, and fringe of dusky forest trees, might be a fairy-haunted spot just now."

She was looking afar, at the blue and distant hill range, over which the shadows were darkening.

"Yes," she answered; "the world of sense and the world of spirit draw very near each other at such an hour, and the conflict between them seems on the point of being reconciled. That is my idea of God: The power that can make all things at one. He in whom all things *are* one."

He smiled, and said, "I must call you down from the spheres, for I have somewhat to say to you, and the moments fly."

She turned a listening face upon him, and was all attention. And yet he lingered.

"Little philosopher," he said, "why do you spend so

many of these sunny hours poring over grim volumes of metaphysics? You see I have noted your habits."

"We women need to cultivate our brains," she said, "to spare our hearts. God knows it is dreary work enough for us at best, so that we need not be reproached with it."

She could have pinched herself for having spoken so passionately, but Mr. Elms always touched the vital point in her experience so squarely, that she could not help but wince.

"Well," he said, "I'm not a woman, but that is my experience, too. God made us so, I fancy. Living first, — after that, or when that fails, the philosophy of living for pastime."

They were silent for a moment.

"Lucia," he said, at length, very softly, "do you know that I am going away?"

"No, indeed," she said, with a sharp accent, as of pain; "where are you going, and for how long?"

"We are going," he said, — "Marion and I, — to search for the elixir of life. I cannot tell how long we may be in finding it."

"You do not mean that you are to leave Ashland altogether?"

"We go first to the Magnetic Springs; shall spend, I presume, the greater part of the summer there. If Marion is benefited by the change, as we hope, we shall perhaps go south for the winter. Our plans are very unsettled as yet; but I have arranged my business for a long absence, and this evening I want to talk to you about Chester."

She looked up at him, her face very pale, but her eyes steady.

"I cannot tell you," he went on, "how much I love that child. I did not dream, at first, that he could ever be so dear to me as he is; and I find that to part from him will cause me more pain than I would acknowledge to any one but you. And do you know, Lucia, I think he loves me almost as well as if I were his own father."

"I should think it very strange indeed if he did not," said Lucia. "But is it so much to you, upon whom the blessings of life are showered so abundantly, to be loved?"

"Ah," he said, with that naïve directness of speech which characterized him in moments of deep feeling, "indeed it is." But with the never-failing smile whenever there was a heart pang to be concealed, "You and I must not talk sentiment to-night." And then he went on to give her a thousand and one admonitions about the boy,—about such things as the most discerning mother might overlook or misjudge, but which, to a father's eye, would seem all-important; chiding her, too, for little motherly weaknesses.

"Don't restrain the child too much," he said. "Give him his liberty; he is a boy to be trusted. He has strong traits, and will not bear too tight a curb."

"Ah, but," she said, sadly, "I have not your firm hand to lay upon the rein just at the opportune moment. If I relinquish control for a season, I give it up for all time."

He stood silent, looking off into the fading sunset.

"I wish I had not to leave you," he said. "But," he added, quickly, "the event is always better than our fears. You will have no trouble, though I see, as plainly as you, how my interference with the child

may have wrought mischief if you cannot now in some measure follow my plan. But you will. I shall trust you for that, Lucia, and you must not fail me."

There were some minor details to settle, and then he was going. And her strong heart, with all its deepest fountains stirred, yearned so importunately for one word of love and comfort that should be her own.

"Mr. Elms," she said, "*do* you wish you had not to leave me?"

It was a hard question to answer, and he held her hand in his silently for a moment.

"For Chester's sake," he said, at length, "I very much wish it."

"And not at all for my sake?"

"Lucia," he said, "spare me."

It was too much. Such self-repression might be possible to him, but not to her. Her strong, impetuous nature burst its bounds.

"No, Chester," she said, withdrawing her hand from his, and standing erect; "I will not spare you. This past year, with its experiences, is, for good or evil, yours as much as mine, and I have a right to ask that you shall face its issues with me. I have no boasts to make, but if my soul were not as white as yours, I would not dare to stand side by side with you, and call myself your friend. God knows, besides, that having found a manhood pure and unsullied, I would count myself baser than the basest if I should put forth a finger to tempt it one line aside from the straight path of duty. I never wilfully quickened your pulses by so much as a finger touch. I have veiled my eyes that you might not guess whether there was in them any radiance of hidden fires. I have held my very garments apart

from you that no unconscious subtlety of magnetism might slip from me unawares to stir the current in your veins. One thing only my soul demands of your soul; demands by the clean challenge of a guerdon given in exchange — Chester, *I love you!*”

Her passionate demeanor had electrified him for a moment, and his breast heaved, and his fingers worked convulsively. But before the rapid torrent of her speech had exhausted itself, he had regained his self-control.

“Lucia,” he said, in a low, firm voice, “you need not hold yourself so far away from me. I am not afraid to touch you. I am not afraid to take you in my arms and tell you that, as my chosen friend, the sweet companion of my joys and glooms, my solace and helper you are dearer to me than any other thing that breathes — except my wife.”

She looked up into his face unsatisfied, with restless, dumb entreaty in her eyes.

“Lucia,” he said, “not outward homage only, but the tribute of my inmost will as well, my wife shall have. I could not say the words you ask, in the sense you mean them, even if they were true.”

She was dissolved in tears now, and he held her head one moment on his breast.

“Chester,” she sobbed, “do you despise me?”

“Despise you!” he said, with swelling bosom, and looking straight into the silent heavens, that he might not meet her eyes. “I tell you, truly, dear soul, you were never half so sweet and glorious in my eyes as you are this moment.”

She stifled her sobs, restrained her tears, raised his

hand to her lips and kissed it silently, and then fled up the garden walk to her own room.

Mr. Elms sprang over the wall, and going to the stable, saddled his horse and rode away. It was midnight when he returned, and the light in Lucia's window was still burning with full and steady radiance. He went to his own room, and threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed. Two hours passed, and still her light burned on, and a restless shadow appeared and disappeared upon the curtain. He looked at his watch; it was half past two. Would she never go to rest? At last, unable any longer to bear the strain, he left his room, stole silently out at the garden door, and, crossing the lawn, mounted the bittersweet wall just under Lucia's window, and, supporting himself by the convenient branch of a cherry tree, tossed a pebble against the casement. There was no answer, and he threw another, calling, softly, —

“Lucia, Lucia.”

The shade was slowly raised, and a figure in white appeared at the window.

“Is it you, Mr. Elms?” she said, in a little amazement.

“Yes,” he answered; “step out upon the balcony a moment, please; I want to speak to you.”

Wrapping a shawl about her, she obeyed him silently, and leaned waiting against the rail.

“I came over in a neighborly way,” he said, “to ask if you wouldn't put out that light and go to bed?”

Lucia's face was fixed, impenetrable.

“Pardon me,” she said; “does my light annoy you? You have only to go to sleep yourself, and you will be unconscious of it.”

"But I think you need rest."

"Is it, then, of consequence to you that I should be rested?"

"Lucia," he said, "I cannot use words of doubtful interpretation; that would not be fair to either of us. Is not the good old Saxon speech, *I like you*, enough between friends who can never be more than friends? Will not that content you?"

"I think my light must continue to burn for a season longer," she said.

A pause.

"Lucia, I am fearfully tired; I need rest; but I can't sleep with that light gleaming out of your window, and the shadow of your restless figure flitting up and down the window curtain."

"Oh! is that it? Then it was not altogether a neighborly kindness which prompted this visit!"

"Motives are often mixed in this world; I think I may have been a trifle selfish."

"It was well that I did not deceive myself with thinking that you cared for me."

"Lucia," he said, "I do *care for you*; you *know* that."

"Humph!" she said, gruffly; "you may go home."

"And you will put out that light, and go to sleep, and dream of me."

"If I am to get any good of my sleep, I must dream of something less vexatious than you are. Go in peace; you shall be no more troubled with the lights and shadows of a forlorn life."

He stood, his face upturned in the still starlight, waiting wistfully for a more gracious word.

"Lucia, reach down your hand to me."

She obeyed him, rather lugubriously.

"You are sure the pain is comforted," he said.

"It must be too fond, and foolish a creature to be worthy your care who would not be so comforted," she answered, a little satirically. "Whatever pain is left will no doubt do me good."

"Lucia, it is getting pearly in the east. I must have a little sleep to-night."

"Well, you have exercised all due and reasonable care over me. Your duty is done; go home, and sleep the sleep of the just."

Hitherto it had been half badinage, as if he had feared to trust himself in deeper soundings, but now his tone grew wholly earnest.

"Lucia, do you think I do not suffer also? Be merciful."

Ah! if he, too, suffered, it was enough; she could bear her pain.

"Chester," she said, "go home. I do understand you. I do see how infinitely above me is the ideal which you hold before me; and I will, God helping me, so live in thought, and word, and deed as to be worthy to be your friend. A promise, with me, is a promise. Go home."

"Ah, Lucia, when your generous nature speaks straight out, it always humbles me."

He looked at her with humility, indeed, in his eyes, but a glad and happy light besides.

"Now you must go," she said, firmly.

"It is now, when you are so noble and so gracious," he answered, "that I want to stay;" and, for the first time his eye lingered lovingly upon her.

"*I shall not stay for you another second," she said;*

"I shall donæ the glim, and bury myself out of sight under the cover."

He laid her hand against his cheek, and, plucking a dewy rose which grew beside him, kissed it, tossed it up into her balcony, and then was gone.

"O whitest of white souls," she murmured, as she watched him to the garden door, "may all good angels comfort you in your hour of need. It is worth many restless nights of pain and suffering, and I pay them willingly, to have known you."

When he reached his window and looked out, her light had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. ELMS and his wife were three months at the Springs, but twice in that time the exigencies of business brought Mr. Elms to the mills, and on both occasions there were brief, bright visits for Lucia and Chester.

"If it were not for Chester," Lucia had often said to herself, "I would certainly break off this perilous friendship at once; but apart from all pecuniary considerations, the two are so happy together that it would be cruel to separate them. And mothers, I suppose, were made to bear burdens for their children, and must not rebel if they weigh with unlooked-for stress." Often, too, she thought of Madam Bernstein's words, "It is inevitable, and in the end you will not wish that it might have been otherwise." So, with many dark forebodings, and many hours of painful resolve and strong endeavor, which no one dreamed of but herself and such good angels as watched her steps, she kept on her way, her bright face and her cheerful voice making light and comfort for all the household.

But as autumn drew near, premonitions of sorrow thickened about her. At first she attributed them to the season, the weather, or some slight nervous derangement. She took more out-door exercise; she occupied herself with books; she made Chester her almost constant companion, and shared his studies. To German

she applied herself with special zeal, and Mr. Le Bœuf found her a wonderfully apt and persevering pupil; but it was all of no avail. She could not shake off the settled despondency which seemed to hang about her like a cloud. "Presentiments are strange things, and so are dreams, and so are sympathies," said Jane Eyre; "and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key."

Mrs. Elms passed the month of October in New York, preparing for her winter journey; but Mr. Elms found it necessary to spend some time at the mills, and so the brown house was opened, and he made his home there for two or three weeks. Janet was with Mrs. Elms, but Norah and Patrick, who had recently been married, were to remain at the house through the winter. During these three weeks Lucia, at Mr. Elms's request, spent two or three days in going over the house, unlocking drawers and closets, airing linen and bedding, and guarding against dampness and mould. Coming out of the house one evening during the last week of his stay, she met Mr. Elms on the doorstep. She had hitherto concealed from him, in great measure, the cloud which hung over her spirits; but this evening, meeting him unexpectedly, she had no time to compose her features, or assume a smiling aspect.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "how tired and worn you look! Are you ill?"

"No," she said; "I'm quite well; but I'm growing old—I found a gray hair to-day, and it has made me sad."

"Oh!" he said, pretending to be deceived, because he saw it was her wish, "I'm glad it is no worse. I have to go to the mills and back yet before tea. Jump into

the buggy and come with me. I have something to say to you."

"Shall I bring Chester, as well?"

"No, you will not bring Chester. I want you alone."

During all this visit his spirits had been very gay. In spite of her reason, it often jarred upon Lucia's feelings to see how much he enjoyed travelling, gay life, and, above all, how radiant he was in the prospect of his wife's recovery; for Marion was growing daily stronger and more hopeful; and even Dr. Spear no longer discouraged her plans. All this coming winter, which looked so hopeless and forlorn to Lucia, lay before him in a far different aspect. Novelty, promise, expectation, charmed him to a degree which could not fail to sadden her, however much she might feel that something of it all was due to that cheerful philosophy which ruled his life, and bade him make the best of all things.

It was a sad, gray evening, the air damp, the sky overcast, the ground heavy with recent rains, and all the banks and ditches strewn with sere and sodden leaves. Mr. Elms's spirit, too, seemed to be a little in sympathy with the time.

"When I go away again," he said, "I shall be beyond the possibility of these flying visits, which have made the summer so bright. It will be six months, at the least, I suppose, before I shall see Ashland again, after next week. It would not be possible for me to leave you so long without establishing a medium of communication. I must know if Chester is well, and how you are all getting on. I have therefore taken into my confidence Collins, my lawyer. He knows, since yesterday, *precisely* in what relation Chester stands to me."

and if, in any way, while I am gone, you need advice, assistance, anything that he or I can give, I want you to promise me that you will go to him. He is sensible and discreet; he has no low ideas or associations: he will look upon this thing just as you and I do; and, above all, he will keep his own counsel, and we shall correspond frequently."

He ceased speaking, and she was silent.

"I hope," he said, "that this arrangement pleases you."

"It is only reasonable that I should be pleased."

"And yet you are not."

"Women are not reasonable beings," she said. "Be satisfied with knowing that I acquiesce in what you have done, and shall fulfil your wishes."

"But, Lucia, I wished you to do more than to acquiesce."

"You wished me to be grateful; well, I am."

"You know that I did *not* wish you to be grateful. Gratitude is not a word to be spoken between you and me."

"I may as well confess to you," she said, "since, as you say, I never hide things well, that I do *not* feel elated with the prospect of any person being made a spy over my moods and tempers during the coming winter. There will be days, possibly, when I shall mope and pine. I should like to do it unobserved. Other days I shall, perhaps, be gay; and then I do not care to be watched, either."

He was silent, and looked perplexed. This essentially feminine view of the case had not occurred to *him*. For once, too, she had deceived him. He hoped *he had* reached, in this petulant outburst, the bottom

of her dissatisfaction, while, in fact, he was far from it. He was startled out of this conclusion by her next question. With the black cloud of this coming dreary winter lowering over her, and the deeper shadow of an unspoken presentiment darkening her heart, her courage had failed, and she was sliding helplessly into the pit which, it seemed to her, yawned forever at her feet.

"And I shall hear from you in no other way," she said, "than in this roundabout fashion, through Collins?"

The question touched, unexpectedly, upon a tender point, and his voice was harsh and constrained as he answered, —

"Probably not."

The words fell like molten lead upon Lucia's heart. She drew in her breath, and held her lips tightly shut; but in that moment there went up from her soul such an appeal to God as had never cleft his heavens before at *her* behest.

"It is true," she said, "I have no rights which he is bound to respect; but *thou*, God, knowest! To thee I make my appeal."

She sat silent and pale as the horse plodded on over the black and muddy road.

"Do you see that tall and ancient poplar yonder?" said Mr. Elms. "I always think, when I pass it, of its curious history. It was a riding-whip once, in the hand of my great-grandmother Bradshaw. She broke it from a poplar which grew before her door in her old home in Vermont, and rode with it to her new home here. And then she planted it, and it grew into *that tree*."

He meant it well. This cool change of subject would save her self-respect, as in some after hour she should review the conversation. All the same she would have been pleased to see lightning strike that poplar then and there.

She did review the conversation in after hours, and she did thank God that all things had happened just as they did. She needed the lesson, and before that ride was over, she knew that it had been dealt with a strong hand for a loving purpose; even if Mr. Elms had not been fully conscious of the effect his words would have, as, no doubt, he had not, her gratitude was due him all the same.

In loving him she had placed herself in a position where she had, indeed, no rights which he was bound to respect. She had never felt it before. If she had not dignity, she had a certain sturdy self-respect, not strong enough, indeed, at this moment to hold her tumultuous impulses in full control, but which was a good foundation to build upon. So a granite rock at the harbor's mouth may not be solid enough of itself to hold the raging billows in check, but it is an excellent basis upon which to commence the erection of a mole. Some months elapsed before Lucia really began to rear her superstructure; but in her cooler moments she never forgot that the rock was there.

I have given a literal transcript of Lucia's mood, without attempting to justify it. In fact, it could not be justified. It was morbid, unreasonable, ungrateful. The truth was, that that Power, which is neither fate nor chance, but which I shall, without hesitation, *denominate* the providence of God, had brought her into *a position* in which it is not in unaided human nature

to maintain itself in dignity and truthfulness; and Lucia, with a religious nature full of beautiful aspirations, had not that profound and intelligent reliance upon a power outside of, and higher than, herself, which would have been sufficient to bring her safely through. Therefore she groped in shadows like those which make dismal the outermost courts of hell.

They reached the mills, and Lucia sat in the buggy while Mr. Elms transacted his business. When it was over, and he seated himself again by her side, he wore a very thoughtful face. The conversation of the last half hour had shown him the danger his friend was in. He felt the morbidness of her mood, the miasm that was poisoning her atmosphere, and it made him very tenderly solicitous for her.

"Lucia," he said, when they were well started homeward, "you must not stay in Ashland all winter. You are not used to the quiet life which reigns here during this season; and just now, especially, I fear it will be harmful to you. There can be no reason why you should not go to New York, taking Chester with you, for the holidays. You could find a pleasant boarding-place in Brooklyn near your friends. And I think you should stay there at least six weeks. Now, promise me that you will do this."

"Would it be wise," she said, "to take Chester from school so long?"

"That is a matter of secondary importance. He is too young yet seriously to miss the time. Besides, it would be a gain to him in his German if he could chatter with little Bertha Schroeder an hour every day. I cannot be contented to think of you as moody and unhappy; it is your own bright, cheerful self that suits

me," he said, smiling upon her with fond appreciation, "and I cannot see you turned into a changeling before my eyes. Madam Bernstein is the very person I could choose for your companion this winter. Promise me that you will go to her."

"I will think of it, and if I find it possible to leave mother, I will go."

She said it sadly, thinking how different the holidays of this year would be from those of the last. There was a silence, and then, in a voice that was very kind, he said, —

"There is one thing more that I want to tell you, Lucia. I do not know if it will comfort you, but it comforts me. It is more than a year now that I have prayed for you as often as I have prayed for myself. Not once in all that time have I laid my head upon my pillow — no matter where I was, no matter what the circumstances — without mentioning your name, before God, in earnest supplication. However great my tenderness and care for you, I cannot perfectly comfort or bless you; but our heavenly Father can, and to his love I trust you, knowing that in the end *it will not fail*."

She knew how true he was; she knew the perfect purity of his life, and she felt in that moment that his prayers must go straight to the heart of God. In spite of herself, the deepest fountains of her nature were unsealed; tears stole through her eyelids, and she wept convulsively.

"Lucia," he said, "promise me that you will pray for me."

"Can my prayers do you good, Chester?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "infinite good."

“I should be very ungrateful, then, to refuse them.”

And so, tenderly and without any preaching, he led her with child-like confidence and trust to the bosom of God.

They talked then of pleasant and comforting things, which did not trench too closely upon dangerous topics ; and when Lucia went to her room to prepare for tea, she was more quietly happy than she had been for many weeks.

CHAPTER XIX.

To Lucia's presentiments were added dreams. She retired in her usual spirits, but, falling asleep, wandered for half the night through a desolate place of graves. She stumbled over memorial stones, and caught her feet in the long, sere grass. Serpents lay coiled in treacherous hollows, or crawled slowly away and hid themselves in charnel vaults among the mouldering bones. At one time she wearily toiled up a steep and rough declivity, and from the top beheld a broad and shimmering sea, with white sails and a peaceful sunset beyond; but a chattering skeleton led her back, and shut her up at last in a tomb, where rows of grinning skulls seemed alternately to mock and to threaten her. Chilled with horrors, she awoke, and found herself bathed in a clammy dampness.

"It is nightmare," she said; and rising and turning up her night lamp, she went to Chester's bedside, and found him sleeping peacefully, with one arm thrown over his head and the flush of youth and health mantling his cheek. She stooped and kissed him, and he started in his sleep and murmured something about his pony, and then relapsed into profound and peaceful slumbers.

Lucia returned to her bed, and thinking of her promise to pray for Mr. Elms, lifted her heart in an earnest

petition for him and for herself, that strength and grace might be given them both in such measure as was needed to keep them pure and upright in all their lives. With that prayer upon her lips she fell asleep, and dreamed a dream, which, to the latest hour of her life, she never forgot.

In a dusky twilight, with a dim, cold sky above her head, she stood beside a dark pool that stretched like a mirror of burnished steel beyond her. The country about her was an uneven waste, but skirted in the distance with low hills and leafless forest trees.

She was gazing into the pool at her own reflection. White drapery, spirit-like and diaphanous, enveloped her from head to foot; her hair was unbound and hung loosely about her shoulders, and over it floated, pallid and dim as a wraith, a bridal veil. Around her neck was hung a heavy, black chain, to which was attached the massive cross of jet, which she held in her hand. She was robed as for her bridal; but there was no nuptial cheer at her heart; she had no sense of any bridegroom; but the black cross she knew was the wedding gift of Mr. Elms. She gazed at the cross, and had a feeling that she ought to pray; but instead, she looked down into the pool, and, giving way to the measureless despair which filled her, was about to cast herself into its waveless depths to find the peace for which she longed, when suddenly she lifted her eyes, and beheld a great light, and the forms of two angels, bearing between them a golden crown, on which, in curious mediæval letters, she read the inscription, *PER TENEBRAS AD LUCEM.*

"Through shadows to the light," she said. "Can that message be for me?"

As the ineffable bright light drew nearer, she gazed steadfastly into the faces of the angels, and behold! she knew them. It was her father and Cecil, and they essayed to put the crown upon her head; but in the rapture of the recognition she awoke.

A holy peace suffused her soul, and it seemed to her, at that moment, that heaven was very near.

But as she drifted slowly back into perfect consciousness, she knew that the day of her trouble was at hand. She must suffer; but there *was* that heavenly love and sympathy for her which she had seen in the angel faces in her dream, if only she could put herself in the attitude to receive it. Oh, should she ever find her soul?

She rose again and looked at Chester, still sleeping the rosy, dreamless sleep of youth and health. She stroked the tangled curls from off his brow. It was cool and healthful; there was no trace of illness or distress; and as she stood over him she felt, as she had never done before, by how slight a tie was all her earthly happiness moored. If the cable should slip, and this bark, freighted with all her love and all her hope, go drifting into the dark! She shuddered for a moment at the thought, and then went back to bed again, and fell into a deep sleep. When she awoke the sun was shining brightly over a frost-gemmed world, and she rose quickly and dressed herself. Chester was already up and gone, and she heard his voice at the stable calling to his pony. He came in to breakfast radiant. This was to be Mr. Elms's final day at Ashland, and Chester was to ride down to the mills with him for the last time before his departure. *He was scarcely through his breakfast when Mr. Elms's voice was heard outside calling to him. He sprang*

from the table, and kissing his mother, went out and mounted the pony. Lucia followed him to the piazza, and watched while Mr. Elms examined the saddle-girth, to make sure that all was right, and then, with a bow, and a gallant gesture of the hand, they were off.

Lucia went about her morning work with a placid mind. Dreams, she had persuaded herself, were always attributable to natural causes. Indigestion or nightmare was accountable for most of them; for others, apprehension, sorrow, or prayerful thought. The sleeping mind was a kaleidoscope, jarred by every touch of accident, and its changes were governed by no law but the law of chance.

Did any one ever expound the law of chance, and fix its rightful place in the code of the universe? And until this is done, is it philosophical to found so much grave reasoning upon it?

Lucia was busy about her room when she heard outside the clatter of galloping hoofs. She had not time to think twice what it might mean before a heavy step sounded on the stair, and in another instant Mr. Elms entered her room, as white as a spirit, and with a bewildered, staggering step.

"Mr. Elms!" she exclaimed. "What is it? Are you hurt?"

"No," he said, with a voice of anguish; "I would to God I had been. O, Lucia, I thought I could tell you better than another; but it is too dreadful."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed. And then, with frantic apprehension, "Where is my boy? where's my Chester?"

He strove to master his emotion then, that he might comfort her.

"Lucia," he said, "be calm. Chester will be here soon; but you must prepare yourself for a dreadful shock."

"Tell me," she said, standing before him with a face that was like the face of a statue, "is my boy dead?"

His lip quivered, and for a moment he could not speak.

"Take me to my child," she said. "I must see for myself."

"No," he answered; "they are bringing him to you."

"And he is dead!"

"O Lucia, dear Lucia," he cried, "don't let it break your heart — poor, tortured, martyred heart."

"But tell me," she said; "I cannot bear this suspense. Is he dead?"

"Oh, it was fearful! Thank God you did not see it! We were galloping over the flat, when the pony stumbled and threw him over his head. His temple struck against a rock by the road-side, and he was dead when I reached him!"

She staggered backward, but caught a chair for support. He would have taken her in his arms, but she would not suffer him to touch her.

She went to the window and looked out. The sad cortège was already in sight.

"I must go and tell his grandmother," she said, quietly.

"But, Lucia," he said, frightened at her calmness, "give me your hand; tell me that this sorrow has not killed you."

She glided past him as though she had not heard him

words. There was nothing for him to do but to follow her. She went straight to Mrs. Denney.

"Mother," she said, with a low and solemn voice, that thrilled her listeners through and through, "our house is left unto us desolate."

Mrs. Denney looked up amazed. Lucia's face was white and wan, but perfectly settled and composed. It was a composure like that of death, Mr. Elms thought.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Denney.

"You have borne much sorrow, mother," continued Lucia. "You can nerve yourself for another blow — can you not? You have lost your husband, and Cecil, too, was taken —"

"What does she mean?" said Mrs. Denney, in a bewildered way, to Mr. Elms. "Is the woman crazy?"

"No, mother," she said, "I am not. Do you not remember that Chester went away with Mr. Elms, and now he has returned alone?"

"Is the child hurt?" she exclaimed.

"I told you our house is left unto us desolate. Our boy is gone."

Mr. Elms was sobbing; but she shed not a tear.

The grandmother groaned, and seizing Mr. Elms's hands, exclaimed, —

"Oh, is it so? Tell me, tell me that there is some dreadful mistake."

"No," he said, "dear Mrs. Denney, it is too true."

The aged woman wept and wrung her hands. At this moment the physician entered.

"Where is my child?" said Lucia, calmly.

"They are coming with the body," he said; "but you must not see it yet, Mrs. Denney."

She considered for a moment, and said, —

“I suppose that is best. Come with me, mother. We will go up stairs and hide our grief; but as soon as may be,” she added, turning to the physician, “you will send for me.”

“Yes,” he said, “I promise it.”

But he looked at Mr. Elms with a countenance that expressed his thought.

Mr. Collins had come in with the crowd that followed the body.

“Collins,” said the physician, “go for a clergyman. Something must be done for that woman, or we shall bury them together.”

The clergyman came, and Mrs. Denney accepted his ministrations, and was quieted by them; but Lucia heard not a word he said.

“As soon as they will let me,” she said, “I shall go to my child; nothing can come between me and him.”

They hoped that the sight of him might unseal the fountain of her tears; but she only sat down by the low couch on which he lay, and took his hand in hers, and laid her hand upon his brow, and kissed it, and twisted his brown curls over her finger, and said not a word, shed not a tear.

All day she sat there, neither eating nor drinking. At night they brought her away almost by force. But at last she lay down upon her bed, and remained quiet till the morning.

At Mr. Elms's request — for the mother seemed to have no option — the child was robed in his Prince Charlie costume. When Lucia saw it, a shiver passed over her; but it brought no tears. She simply remained whiter and more impassive than ever. Even

the grandmother controlled her grief for the dead out of solicitude for the living.

The funeral came and passed, and there was still no change in her. Kind friends ministered to her; the clergyman came and prayed with her; but she scarcely seemed to notice them. Mr. Elms sat by her side, and begged her to speak to him, to give some voice to her grief; he tried to win from her some desire about the memorial stone, which he proposed to order before he left for the South. It was useless. She simply answered him with grave composure that he must do as he thought best.

At last the day came when his departure could be no longer delayed. Marion was suffering again from paroxysms of intense pain, and he *must* go to her. But to leave this stricken mother in such a state was impossible. He walked his room through the long watches of one dreary night, praying for wisdom, and strength, and tenderness to break this dreadful spell which lay upon a heart that was far dearer to him now, in its agony of grief, than it had ever been in happier days.

He rose at last from an untasted breakfast, and went out to the green-house and cut a basket of flowers. With these in his hand he approached her. She was sitting by the window of her own room, a spot she seldom left now.

"Lucia," he said, "I am going away to-day, and I come to bid you good by. I have brought you a few flowers, too. Will you not look at them?"

He placed them in her lap, and as her eye fell on a lovely waxen rose which lay in the centre, it brightened a trifle. It was but a transient gleam.

"They are beautiful," she said, "and I thank you."

And then she rose and placed the basket upon the bureau. She sat down again, and as if she felt that something was required of her, said, —

"I hope you will have a pleasant journey, and that the change will benefit Mrs. Elms."

"And is that all you have to say to me?" he said. "We have not been used to part in this manner, Lucia."

"No; when I was happier," she answered, "I had friends; but now all the world is alike to me."

The words smote sore upon his heart; but he maintained his composure. It was useless to talk to her of duty, useless to offer the commonplaces of condolence — all these had been vainly tried. Her mind was stunned, and could not respond to them. There was no medicament that would reach this ailment but deepest tenderness and love. He knew it well, and his heart ached almost to bursting to bestow it. But if she was insensible to duty, he was not, and he trusted in God to open some way for him out of this strait and narrow place.

"Lucia," he said, "is there no comfort which you will take at my hands?"

She looked up into his face with stony, immovable despair.

"How shall that soul be comforted," she said, "to whom there is left no voice in all the earth to say, 'I love you'?"

She had not meant it for a reproach, but his face grew ashen pale, his limbs shook, and he knelt beside her, and put his arms about her.

"Lucia," he said, "God knows, and he must comfort

you, for I cannot." He bowed his head against her shoulder, and she could feel his heaving chest and the working of his frame in anguish. There was silence.

"Lucia," he said at length, "will you not think of me for one moment. Am I not bereft? Am I not also childless, and more than childless? Will you send me away with this sorrow upon my heart besides? After this hour, it will be long till we meet again."

Again there was a pause; but presently her bosom heaved, and a tear stole softly down her cheek.

"Chester," she said. She had not spoken the word before since that first, frantic outcry, "Where's my boy? Where's my Chester?" He alone had noted the fact. He alone knew what that silence meant, and the sound thrilled him to his heart's core.

"Thank God!" he said, with earnest emphasis.

He leaned forward, and softly brushed away the tear-drop; but others followed it. He waited till he saw that the breaking up had really come, and then, rising and holding her hand one moment in a close, warm pressure, he said, —

"Good by, Lucia; God bless and keep you! I shall not cease to pray for you; I shall not forget you. Good by."

The door closed, and he was gone, — gone in his peerless strength, his steadfast integrity. He could never, never more be hers; never, on this earth, should she meet his peer.

She bowed her head and wept.

"God," she cried, "that there may be such souls in heaven!"

The current of her grief was directed into another channel, and she was saved.

CHAPTER XX.

SAVED, but not comforted ; for her tears, once started, scarcely ceased to flow, day or night, for weeks. Wherever she went, some dumb memorial of her boy brought up his image afresh, and her heart cried out anew against Heaven and its decrees. She had arranged her flowers in a vase, and placed them upon her table ; and always, when she looked at them, they seemed to utter a meek protest against this overwhelming grief.

"God made us," they said. "He robes his whole creation in living beauty. Trust him, as we do, even in the face of the tempest and the whirlwind."

But her heart was hardened against their appeal ; her mind was confused, her reason and intuition blinded by the vain philosophies of men ; and the simple teaching of nature, and the authoritative voice of revelation, were alike powerless to check her rebellious sorrow. Presently, duty made an appeal. The death of her grandson had struck Mrs. Denney with all the force of a crushing blow. She was more patient than Lucia, for she had less power of resistance ; but she never rallied from the stroke.

"My life is blotted out from among the living," she said. "Let me go to my dead ; they only have any claim upon me."

She sat down in her chimney corner and folded her

hands, and gave herself up a prey to sorrow and disease. And Lucia, who was a woman made for duties, devoted herself with silent, hopeless fortitude to the task of watching the outgoing of her life. This purpose steadied her impulses, and imparted something like outward composure to her aspect; but her heart was just as hard and defiant as ever. If she did not say it, the inner core of her thought was, —

“God has no right to strip my life, not only of all its bloom and beauty, but of its hope and cheer, as well. I am sad and gloomy because I can but be sad and gloomy. The fault is not mine. It is God’s, if there be a God; it is in the Universe, if that be all.”

And so she drifted in a rayless night upon a stormy sea, without oar or rudder. But unseen of her eyes, unfelt of her consciousness, the Father, whose loving hand had chastened her, was close by her side. “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” That is the promise with which each soul starts out upon its pilgrimage through the desert of human sin and suffering, and it is a promise never once forgotten or unkept.

The winter shut down cold and drear. There were no snow-storms, but sunless skies, and raw and chilly winds, and sleety, frozen rains, that bound the whole earth in chains of icy desolation. Day after day Lucia stood at her window looking out upon the cheerless scene, recalling to herself Dante’s wonderful word painting of the windy and the rainy hells. This wind that swept about her, whirling the dead leaves around before its retributive blast, was that very “infernal hurricane that never rests,” “hurtling the spirits onward in its rapine, whirling them round, and smiting;” this the very rain, “eternal, maledict, — and cold and heavy . . .

huge hail and water sombre-hued, and snow, athwart the tenebrous air poured down amain."

The story of the hapless Francesca came back to her with fresh power and pathos, and slipping away from her tasks one day, she wrapped herself in a thick plaid, and crossing the lawn, entered the garden door of the brown house, and sought the library. The house was scarcely warm, for the furnace was running at but half its capacity, but with her shawl she managed to be comfortable; and taking down a copy of the *Inferno*, and seating herself in an easy-chair, she turned to the fifth canto, and commenced reading. Through circle after circle, she descended into those dreary regions of the lost, till at last she found herself in the limbo of souls who are imprisoned in trees, the leaves of which are eaten by the harpies, and their trunks torn by wild beasts, till clots of blood and shrieks of anguish issue from them.

Lucia shuddered.

"A horrible conceit!" she said; "how could it ever visit the brain of a poet. My inmost soul shrinks from the picture."

And yet her mind would dwell upon it in spite of her, as if fascinated by horror.

"A human soul," she said, "a divine thing, a spark of the uncreated, so imprisoned — it is monstrous!"

Then suddenly a flash of vision came to her.

"Oh," she said, "the poet is right. Not in Hades only is that hell found. Are not human souls by thousands so imprisoned in the wood of circumstance, and do not the harpies of events, the wild boars of human passion, rend and tear them till they cry out in horrible shrieks and groans?"

Suddenly her thought ceased, and consciousness took up the revelation. Nay, was there not in *her* being a spark of the divine, a power uncreated, indestructible, absolute; and was it not just now hedged in, held fast, tormented by the outward, the perishable, the transient?

She bowed her head in solemn awe before the mystery. Clearer and clearer stood forth the truth before her consciousness. She, too, was akin to the Divine. In her being was vested an heirship to the eternal ages. As a child of the infinite, whatever was grand, and noble, and joyous, and blessed in the whole universe of mind and matter, belonged, by an inalienable right, to *her*. She had only to arise and take possession of her inheritance. But here she crouched instead, in base, ignoble, selfish despair. She felt humble and penitent before the thought of it. She knew not which way to turn for light, direction, help. She groaned aloud. She cried out as unto a great darkness for the succor that she needed. *She had found her soul, but she had found it in hell.*

Oh, who would tell her where was God, and what was God!

“An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for a light;
And with no language but a cry.”

That was her condition exactly. She knew enough about science to feel that it had no answer to give. What it said truly, was, to a certain degree, authoritative; but what said it? Much indeed about matter, but what about soul? Alas! nothing, or next to nothing. The most it could do at present was to shake one's faith in all the old authorities. It could tear down, but it could not yet build up. But Lucia had come

to that point which, sooner or later, all souls must reach, where the only thing desirable is TRUTH. She would tolerate no veil between her and the Father. Like Moses of old, her cry was, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." She would go anywhere, would follow any leading, any direction that should bring her to that blessed goal at last. A sight of the Father's face — that she must have or perish.

With that sharp, importunate cry upon her lips and in her heart, she put away her books and started to go home.

Meeting Norah in the dining-room, she was not too much absorbed to say to her, —

"The house is looking in excellent order, Norah. I am sure Mr. Elms would be pleased with your faithfulness if he were here to witness it."

Norah courtesied at the compliment, and Patrick, who overheard it from the kitchen, and who was never better pleased than to hear his wife praised, came forward with his best bow, and said, —

"An' if ye plaze, ma'am, I'll be puttin' that same into a letter, I'm jist a writin' to the masther."

Lucia gave a smiling assent, and paused on.

CHAPTER XXI.

OVER and over in her mind, Lucia revolved the question,—

“What is God? The true Divine, where dwells he? What are his attributes? What his disposition? How shall a human soul be brought into true relations with him?” She read the Bible at times, but she read it heartlessly and without faith. She had no faith. She wanted the proof that it was what it claimed to be—the Word of God. It seemed as if there ought to be a revelation somewhere; but scholars were picking so many flaws in Bible history and Bible statements, while theologians themselves contended without ceasing about Bible doctrines! It looked dark to her; she scarcely thought it possible that she could find God there. At last, as hour after hour she pondered over the solemn and distracting theme, she chanced to remember that once she had heard a sermon which was meant to prove that God made all things for his own glory; that the happiness of his creatures was to him a secondary consideration; himself was first, and chief, and all. She had revolted against the thought at the time. “Whatever God is,” she had said, “he is not selfish.” She believed that now. That one fact she would lay down as the foundation upon which to build—God was not selfish. Then, if she would live in the

Divine, she, too, must renounce selfishness. There was work for her. She could go about that at once.

Christmas Eve came. It was two weeks now since she had found her soul. The spot whereon that revelation had come to her possessed a charm, a sort of sacredness. She would go there again; perhaps in that still atmosphere, with the hearts and souls of generations of dead and living authors throbbing silently about her, and, above all, with the living memory of one she loved pervading not the stillness only, but the very furniture of the room, touching her heart to its utmost of tenderness and aspiration; perhaps there, some comfort would come to her from the heart of the Infinite, the Unseen, the Unknown — alas! must she say also the Unknowable?

She entered the library, and, to her surprise, found a huge pile of logs laid upon the hearth. In another instant Patrick appeared at the door with a pan of coals.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," he said, "for interrupting ye; but ye see, ma'am, it's the masther's orders that when ye come over again there should be a fire laid and waitin' fur ye; and I've jist come in to give it a start. I'll not be but a minute, ma'am."

"Why, Patrick," she said, "how came you in possession of such orders?"

"By the means of a letter, ma'am. Ye'll mind I asked yer permission to sind word to the masther of the bit of a complimint ye was plazed to pay Norah; and I mintioned, besides, that ye had been over to read in the library. An' the masther, he thought at once — it was like him, yersilf know, to think of it — that ye'd likely be cowl'd. So he jist wrote that very day, direct

as could be, that I should mind to have a fire always ready fur ye. So there it goes, a blazin' finely; an' do ye jist sit here and enjoy it fur two hours if ye like. There's wood in the box to last ye till midnight, fur that matter."

Saying that, he hurried out; and it was well, for Lucia could not keep back the tears another instant. He had not forgotten her, then; he had not ceased to pray for her. Who could tell but his prayers might be, after all, the golden chain that would draw her at last unto the very bosom of God? She knelt upon the hearth, and spread out her hands to warm them by this fire which had been kindled by a spark from his loving heart. She watched the cheery, leaping, living blaze go careering up the chimney. She could have pressed each separate spire of flame to her passionate lips, because each one was a messenger from his heart to hers.

"God bless and keep him!" she cried, "and bring him safely back, and make me ever and ever more worthy to be his friend." And something whispered to her that *that* was a voice out of the Divine.

She rose at last, sat down in his easy-chair, took up his paper-knife from the table, and commenced to read. Reading and meditating, the hours passed away till twilight came. She rose comforted, but still sad, for as she wrapped her shawl about her, she remembered that it was Christmas Eve, and the Christmas cheer for her was all buried in that small grave over yonder on the hill. No stocking to be filled to-night, no pretty surprises of love to be planned. Nobody had made wreaths to hang in her window; nobody would wake her in the morning with a rain of kisses, and shouts of "Merry Christmas, mamma, merry Christmas! What

a lazy mamma it is, to be sure, to be sleeping so late — and this Christmas morning! Why, I've been awake since the cock crowing!"

She sat down upon the hearth-rug again, with the fire-light scattering the dusk about her, and thought —

"In the divine life one is not selfish, neither can one be gloomy. My child is gone to God; so, though I mourn, I must not refuse to be comforted. If my heart aches, let me the more deeply rejoice with those who can rejoice. If all that dear Madam Bernstein believes be true, my boy may come home to me to spend his Christmas, after all. And what if his father and my father were to come, too? Would it not pain them to find me sad? Dear spirit of this joyous flame, thou also art of God. Help me, therefore, to take in thy brightness, thy vigor, thy heartsome cheer, and go home and be happy to do the will of God, whatever that may be."

She was cheered and brightened. "There," she said, with an actual smile, "I have prayed like a Parsee; now I will go home and keep my Christmas like a Christian."

But the evening mail had come in; so she walked down to the post-office. She passed Mr. Collins's office, and as she came back, that gentleman appeared at the door, and greeted her.

"I am just closing a letter to Mr. Elms," he said; "what shall I tell him for you?"

She stood a moment thinking. "May I write a line myself?" she said.

"Certainly you may," he answered.

She stepped into the office, and, taking a pen, wrote at the bottom of the finished letter, —

"Chester, I have been sitting in your library, and the fire warmed me. I knelt upon the hearth as before an altar-fire, and prayed for you and for myself. I have been sad, but henceforth it is well with me. LUCIA."

Mr. Collins directed the envelope while she was waiting, and as she ceased writing, he handed it to her, and she enclosed and sealed the letter. She went home feeling that she had given joy to one heart, and that was a deed worthy of the Christmas time.

As she entered the house, she caught a glimpse of a vanishing coat-tail in the chink of a swiftly-closed door. She did not enter the parlor, but went straight to her own room. She had said that there were to be no loving surprises this Christmas; but what was this that met her eye?

Christmas wreaths in her windows, her mirror festooned with blossoming vines, a great cloud of pink and white azalias all about her bureau, lovely ferns and leaf-plants at her window, over the bed's head a star of white flowers and green leaves, and upon her table, among her books, a cross of exquisite camellias! The whole room a fairy bower of bloom and beauty. To crown all, upon her bureau a card — CHESTER ELMS.

Her heart gave a great bound. For an instant she was truly deceived. It seemed to her that he must have been there in person. The next moment she understood it all. This was the secret of Patrick's hearty injunction to stay two hours, if she 'plazed,' in the library. It was he and the gardener who had done it all; and the card was Norah's thought, she found out after.

"Sure," Norah had said, in her pretty simplicity, "it is a card they laves behind 'em when they makes a co-"

and finds no one ; and wasn't it the master himself who was there while she was gone ? ”

Yes, it was the master himself who was there, and she felt it.

“ His care for me,” she said, “ is like the providence of God ; ” and that was another revelation of the divine. Light was coming to her fast ; and while she went about among her flowers, and inhaled their fragrance, and blest the giver of them, another conviction sank into her consciousness. Her boy was there, and he had helped to plan this sweet surprise ; and there was a cloud of loving lookers-on about her, and they were all happy because she was happy ; and somehow — she could not tell how, but she felt it surely — the loves of earth and the loves of heaven were all one love, and that love was all of God.

And so it was a very merry Christmas, after all.

CHAPTER XXII.

BUT Christmas cheer is for a season only. As the winter dragged wearily along, Lucia had many gloomy and sorrowful hours. Mrs. Denney was slowly wasting away, and she could bear no one about her but her daughter-in-law. So Lucia hid her own griefs as much as might be, or reserved them for her midnight hours, and patiently and faithfully fulfilled the duties of the sick room. In April the sad soul was released from earth, and went to join its loved ones. Then Lucia was indeed alone in the world.

Her little note to Mr. Elms had brought her a long and kind reply — a reply which settled the question to her heart, if it had not been settled before, that in him was no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Yet it had asked for no answer, and she had made none. She knew that the travellers would be at home in the spring, and she felt that it would be better for her to be away. She remembered, besides, Madam Bernstein's injunction — "When every earthly tie is broken, come to me; I shall have direction for you." That had been Mr. Elms's wish, also. So she made arrangements to rent the house, which was her house now, — for her mother-in-law had bequeathed her all her property, — and to go to New York. In the midst of these preparations, however, came a most distressing rumor. There

had been a railroad accident upon one of the southern roads, and among the names of the fatally wounded appeared in the first reports that of Mr. Elms. Later accounts omitted the name; but as there came no despatch from him, his friends were seriously alarmed.

Mr. Collins came to call on Lucia.

"It is very strange," he said, "that we do not hear from Mr. Elms; and I have thought that, if it were your wish, I would undertake a journey to ascertain his condition. With only an invalid wife and a servant about him, he might be left to suffer among strangers."

"Indeed, Mr. Collins," said Lucia, as calmly as she could, "I do not think you ought to wait for advice from me. I am not supposed to have any immediate interest in the matter; but you are a man, and his friend, and I beg that you will go at once."

The womanly inconsistency of the reply almost caused Mr. Collins to smile; but he proceeded gravely, "I supposed you were aware, Mrs. Denney, that you have a very immediate interest in this event. On the evening before his departure, Mr. Elms so changed his will, that in case of his death you would become a joint executor, and the heir of by far the greater portion of his estate. The will reads, —

"In consideration of the great affliction which has befallen her in the sudden death of her son, my namesake,' &c.

"I remember his saying sadly, as he dictated the words, 'I can never make up the loss which I have caused, but I must do the best I can.'"

Tears came into Lucia's eyes, but she restrained them.

"Go to him at once," she said; "I do not think him

dead. It seems to me that if he were, the very earth itself would speak and tell me. I do not think him dead, but he may be suffering, and you may be the means of saving his life. Lose not a moment, but go at once, I entreat you."

But before he could set out, a letter came to Lucia in Mr. Elms's own hand. It said, —

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I have wonderful news to tell you, and I have seized this first moment of leisure after our merciful escape from danger to write you. We left Jacksonville on the 27th, expecting to journey slowly homeward. Marion was not gaining, and what slight hope I had entertained of her recovery had altogether vanished. She herself was silent, but indomitable.

"On the second day of our journey, as you may have read in the papers, a severe accident occurred. Two cars were thrown off the track, and rolled some distance down an embankment. I fortunately found myself with a few bruises, but not seriously injured. Of course my first thought was for Marion; and after a short search, I found her buried under a pile of debris, wedged in, in such a manner that it seemed to me she must be fearfully crushed; but I saw at once that she was living, and her face was even serene.

"‘Dear Marion,’ I said, ‘are you killed? Are you seriously hurt?’

"‘No,’ she answered, looking up with those calm eyes of hers. ‘No, I am scarcely bruised; and, Chester, *I can move my feet.*’ I thought at first it must be an hallucination, but after a half hour we succeeded in extricating her; and, Lucia, it was true. The sudden,

nervous shock had wrought a seeming miracle. She stood upon her feet, and walked feebly, indeed, at first, but with constant increase of strength; and now, one week after the accident, you would scarcely dream that she was, so short a time ago, a helpless invalid. She is gaining rapidly in flesh and strength, and is the happiest creature that I ever saw.

"I have written this intelligence to you before any one else; because, if I know you at all, you would rather have it from me than from another. I need not tell you what joy the event has brought me; how a great cloud seems lifted off my heart and off my life; and I feel, Lucia, that, however it might be with another, you will rejoice with me.

"Believe me, I do not forget your lonely life. I do not cease to pray, that God, who has in mercy remembered me and mine, will comfort you also out of the immeasurable storehouse of his blessing. I wish I might have told you this, and so with eye and voice have made it sure to you how unalterably I am

Your affectionate friend,

CHESTER ELMS.

"P. S. Janet was not injured, and we expect to be in New York by the first of June."

Lucia read the letter, and re-read it until every word of it was imprinted upon her memory. And at first there was a great uprising of rebellion and envy in her heart. "Her life," she said, "is sheltered, and sweet, and safe. Care and tenderness, and every luxury, every refinement of life, are showered upon her. She has the utmost devotion of a heart whose lightest look of love is

a heritage of bliss, and I am left alone under cold, gray, angry skies. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It was days before this flood-tide ebbed; but at last its rage was spent, and then something within her said, 'This is the flesh which cries out; the soul must have a larger word to say.'

She listened. On the silence stole this voice:—

"Why should I grieve if there should be a soul so large and true that it can bless more lives than one. I do not quarrel with the sunshine because it shines into beggar's hut and palace hall, as well as into my garden. It is sunshine all the same; it warms, and cheers, and blesses. If others strive to shut up and appropriate this light, so will not I. What God and Chester choose to give me, that will I take, and be thankful; and in the joy of what I have, forget the pain of that which I have not."

It was the soul which had spoken, and Lucia accepted its decree.

"He shall love others as much or as little as he can," she said; "for, after all, love is not wholly of the will, but somewhat of God's giving or withholding, and he shall love me as much or as little as he can. Whatever makes him happy blesses me; whatever God appoints my soul accepts."

From that moment the sin of an unlawful love was no longer hers.

She knelt and poured out her soul to God in prayer. She prayed for Chester, that all his fondest hopes might indeed be realized; for Marion,—yes, for Marion,—that God's blessing might rest upon her, and abide with her; that she might be in all things a true and happy wife.

and, if God so willed, a fond and faithful mother ; and for herself, that the peace of that unselfish love, which is like the love of God, might evermore be hers.

When she rose from that prayer, she knew that her soul was out of limbo.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCIA found herself cordially welcomed by the Schroeders. From Madam Bernstein especially she received that quiet, unspoken sympathy which was precisely what she needed. At last, one day, at the close of a long and friendly chat, Madam Bernstein said, —

“One cloud which veils your sky, dear Lucia, you have not mentioned, and there is no need. I know it by that instinct which a community of sorrow imparts. No one in America knows the story of my past life. But I feel impelled to relate it to you, because it seems to me that it will console you to know that out of the keenest suffering may come — nay, I truly believe does always come, if only the soul be attuned to Christ-like patience and resignation — the most exalted joy.

“Almost in infancy I was betrothed to Berthold Bernstein. It was a family compact, made without at all consulting the parties most interested; in fact, completed, in all except the final ceremony, before either Berthold or myself was of age to understand the nature of marriage. As I grew up, however, Berthold was not displeasing to me. He was a fine, strong youth, well connected, well educated, and of good fortune. He loved me with devotion. What more could I ask? At the university he had a dear friend. Two years before our marriage was to be consummated, when I was

in fact scarcely more than a child, August came to visit Berthold. He was like a brother to Berthold; and, the two families being intimate, he was with us in all our joys and all our sorrows. My betrothed, who was older and more experienced than I, was large-hearted and unsuspicious. It was not possible that he should be, upon light grounds, jealous of his friend. It came to pass, therefore, that before any of us were aware, August and I were as thoroughly united in heart as we were divided by fate. I believe that true love is to every soul a revelation out of heaven of its own possibilities of achievement. I shall never forget the day, when, having rescued me from a sudden peril to my life, August exclaimed, —

“‘My God, my God, I love her, and she is another’s!’

“There is no cry in all the world like that cry, I think, when it is uttered by a brave young heart, which feels for the first time the mighty inspiration of love. “It is thirty years ago, and yet I feel at this moment the pang which rent me then.

“We sat down together hand in hand. We talked little; we thought much. August was noble, I, of the people. August indeed was free, but I alas! was betrothed. It was then and there that August took an oath against caste, against prescription, against hereditary right, which, I hear, he has since nobly fulfilled. Ah, well! I cannot tell you of that time. Concealment was not in the nature of either of us. I went to Berthold and confessed all. He grew very white.

“‘My betrothed,’ he said, ‘you must never see August again.’

“I covered my face with my hands. ‘My God,’ I said to myself, for I dared not say it aloud, ‘how can I

live and never see him any more?' It seemed to me that the sun, alas! had grown dark. The noblest thing of all was, that Berthold was never angry. He would have died if he could thereby have given us joy; but in those old countries custom and family considerations are too strong for simple love. But I am glad that Berthold was never mean of soul. It has made life possible to me; nay, even cheerful, when otherwise I do not see how I could have lived at all.

"Upon our marriage day, I said to him, 'Berthold, we must leave fatherland. August has ties; the land holds him. But you and I are free; we must go to America. Grant me that, and I will be your true and faithful wife. What I have promised I will hold to. If I keep faith with God, he will keep faith with me!'

"It was done. That was almost thirty years ago. My life has been a shadowed, but neither a sad nor a gloomy one. My husband has been five years dead. But my Carl, who is all that is left me of my three children, is wedded in this country; so here I stay. O, August, August, where are you!"

"Dear friend," said Lucia, tearfully, "why has God made all these heart-pangs, all these dreadful possibilities of pain necessary to our lives? It is very dark to me. I cannot see at all through these black shadows of despair."

"Do not say despair! Never speak that word in connection with a true heart-experience," said Madam Bernstein. "It is not possible for one who *loves* to despair, for *love* carries with it its own warrant of immortality. It is the selfishness of passion which grows desperate and dares to doubt. A life of pain wears thin the walls between the seen and the unseen, till

through their bright translucency, some characteristics of the world beyond may possibly be traced. This am I sure of: that love survives all mortal dissolutions; but in the change it is purged clear of all dross of human selfishness. Happy they who can learn on earth to make sense subservient to soul. That instinct which points towards the preservation of the race is, no doubt, next in strength to the instinct of self-preservation; but *love and honor can surmount both*. And God has so made us, that forever dying, we live again; and each new life is more glorious than the last.

"One thing more, dear child, my life has taught me. To the soul which truly loves there is a spiritual possession possible, which is finer and truer, more life-giving than the possession of the senses. All that was grand, and noble, and pure, and true in my August entered into my soul, and became eternally and indefeasibly mine. All through my married life, the thought of him was a talisman to me. Was I tempted to be impatient, to give way to weakness and repining, I thought, No, that is not best. Because August loved me, I will be worthy of that high distinction. It was the nobility of his soul which forbade that I should ever shed a tear for him, ever sully his memory with an unholy thought. He was to me as a bright archangel, as my thought of Christ, a strong attraction to draw my spirit heavenward. So he has been *mine* through all these years. So even in death I shall possess him still!"

"Dear friend," said Lucia, touched to tears by her friend's enthusiasm, "I thank you for this revelation of yourself. It strengthens my hope, that out of sorrow and humiliation, God will bring me, even me, at last to behold his face in peace and purity. No human being

knows what I have suffered in seeking to reconcile my love for what is to me the noblest revelation of human nature which I ever beheld, with the spirit and letter of the inevitable law of human progress. You have given me light, but there is still so much which is doubtful to me!"

"Ah, it is God who knows best! Let us trust him still, whatever means he takes to teach us that self-restraint, that steadfast uprightness of soul, which can hold all the powers of flesh and sense in perfect and serene control, making them bow to the soul's behest, and not the soul to theirs."

"And happiness?"

"That comes after. But be assured there is no happiness that is worthy of a noble soul to be found upon the lower and ignoble planes of life. These sharp pangs of suffering are the instruments by which God forces our unwilling souls upward. The more readily we respond to the direction, the sooner will the discipline be withdrawn."

"Do you remember," said Lucia, "that at my last visit you promised me that when I was bereft of every earthly support, if I would come to you, you would direct me?"

"Yes," said she; "I have known now for some days what your immediate future was to be. Can you not guess it?"

"No," said Lucia, looking up in surprise, "I am sure I cannot."

"Professor and Mrs. Schroeder are going to Europe for the summer. Why should you not go with them? They will return in the autumn. But I think you will winter in South Germany, where Mr. Schroeder has

friends, with whom I am sure you would find a pleasant home."

Lucia sat for some moments in silence.

"I believe it is the best thing I can do," she said; "and I see literally nothing to hinder. I do not wish to go back to Ashland this summer; I have no motive to stay here, and the bounty of my mother-in-law has made me mistress of sufficient means for such a journey."

"What I have already told you," said Madam Bernstein, "is certainly no proof of spiritual insight; but there is something more. You do not go abroad for mere pastime and recreation. You are sent to find happiness. There is comfort, light, life in store for you, and you will find it before you return."

"I can't see how," said Lucia.

"It is true, nevertheless."

"But you told me once that when my time of trial was over, I should not regret to have suffered it. Now it can never be that I shall not regret the death of my child."

"Dear friend, have patience. I have only human insight. I cannot justify beforehand the words of my lips; but God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain. One thing I know, you will return from Europe with especial cause for gratitude that you went, and I shall live to hear you confess it."

It was settled immediately that Lucia should go abroad in June with the Schroeders. She had few preparations to make, but her heart did anxiously yearn to see her friend once more. Calling at her bankers two days before she was to sail, she learned that Mr. and Mrs. Elms were already in town. It was a simple

duty, then, to pay a call. She dressed herself carefully, ordered a carriage, and drove to Mrs. Van Benschoten's residence.

The ladies were not in, which, to tell the truth, was a relief to her, and she left a card.

The next day, sitting in her room, she heard the door bell ring, and a voice she knew, sounded in the hall below. It was Mr. Elms. He was asked to wait in the parlor, and she heard him walking restlessly to and fro.

With a swift adjustment of her simple mourning toilet, she went to meet him. As she descended the stairs, it occurred to her that she ought to bear herself with dignity in this coming interview, and she entered the room with that determination; but the genial face and cordial tone which greeted her, put to flight all thought of rules, and she advanced to meet him with outstretched hands and glowing countenance.

"Chester," she said, standing by him in the old familiar way, as he seated himself in an arm-chair, "I am thoroughly glad to see you; more than glad to congratulate you."

He looked into her face with a kind, yet penetrating glance. "I thank you," he said.

"And more than that I want to say, just now, while it is your old friend Lucia who speaks,—by and by Mrs. Denney will arrive:—Once I quarrelled with fate; but since your great happiness has come, since you have indeed a wife, I freely and gladly accept its decrees. And believe me, as no one else has loved you as I have,—for I have loved you well enough to *give you up*,—so no one else rejoices for you with a joy so

deep and unselfish as mine. It is true; you will believe it — will you not?"

"Lucia," he said, "it is a truth which needs no attestation. I knew it beforehand. When it is a matter of unselfish devotion that is required, there is no one else like you. You will remember that I said that — will you not? *No one else.*"

"Thank you," she said; "now tell me about Marion."

She took her hand from the clasp of his, and seated herself upon the sofa. Mrs. Denney had arrived.

"Marion will come to see you soon," he answered; "but we have an engagement for the opera this evening, and she has yet to be very careful of her strength. You see I could not wait."

"I am glad that you did not," said Lucia, "for this is my last day in America for many months. I sail for Europe to-morrow."

He was surprised, but after a moment's thought said, —

"I congratulate you, for though I shall miss you heartily from Ashland, I have no doubt but you have chosen wisely, and will return refreshed and invigorated. The winter has worn upon you, Lucia. You are thin and pale."

"It is partly my dress which makes me look pale."

"Those sad, mourning robes, Lucia," he said, with a faltering voice, "they point me back to what is still the saddest event of my life. Why must it have been so?"

"Do not speak of it now," she said. "I cannot yet think of my boy with composure. It is all dark and mysterious in that direction, and I try not to think of it."

They were silent for a moment, each busy with thoughts of all the changes which the last two years had brought.

"It seems to me, sometimes," he said, "the hardest thing of all for me to bear, that when I would have given all my possessions to bless you and make you happy, I have only been able, after all, to fill your cup with pain and sorrow. Will you believe, dear Lucia, that I share the pain with you, and would assuage the sorrow if I could?"

"I think," she said, smiling, "that you and I never need to be explained to each other. Whatever clouds come between us are of the elements, and not of us. They scatter of themselves."

"That does not tell it," he said, earnestly; "*they are not there*; they are as unreal as the mirage. Looking into your face to-day, and feeling your presence about me, I realize what Emerson means when he says, 'It is only the finite which has thought and suffered. The infinite lies stretched in smiling repose.' Beyond all transient pain and change, *you and I* remain changeless and true."

The ladies of the house came in then, and the conversation became general. As Mr. Elms rose to go, however, they considerably made their adieus and slipped out. He came, and stood by her for a moment, and offered her his hand in silence.

"This, then, is good bye," she said. "When I meet you again it shall be in a region beyond the clouds, serene and sunswept."

"God grant it," he answered. "Good bye."

"Mr. Schroeder," said Lucia, when that gentleman came in to dinner, "I have a commission for you; you

are to get me tickets for the opera this evening, and to order a carriage. This is our last night in America, and I mean to celebrate it in that manner."

Mr. Schroeder asked no questions, but obeyed her command.

Lucia took care to provide herself with a good glass. Their seats, according to her instructions, commanded a full view of the house, and she was early on the ground. Her vigilance was rewarded. She saw the door of Mrs. Brevoort's box open; she saw the party enter. It was Marion for whom all her glances were reserved. And she was radiant. Her costume was a pale-blue silk that fitted her symmetrical form *à merveille*, with an overskirt of costly lace, and the sapphires flashing and gleaming with their spirit-like radiance. The wonderful gold-bright hair was exquisitely coiffed. It was crimped into a halo about her brows; it was rolled in massive coils about her head; it hung in long, graceful ringlets down her swan-like neck. She was as beautiful as Titania, and as bright and joyous as she was beautiful. Mr. Elms was quiet and serene, but evidently very happy. His devotion was lover-like.

As Lucia sat, herself unobserved, and watched them, she almost regretted that she had given herself this perilous pleasure. It was not so long ago that she could not remember the night when she had sat in that box, and the light, the fragrance, and the music had made a fairy world for her; and in the background of her merriment had been care, and kindness, and companionship, that had made for her something more blissful and substantial, she had thought then, than a mere fairy scene. But it had vanished now — whither? By what power are the elements combined and dis-

solved, and recombined in this curiously shifting human life? "Who, by searching, can find out God?" cried old Job. And yet it seemed to her, at times, that death itself would be an easy price to pay only to know the secret of this solemn phantasmagoria which we call life.

The curtain dropped, the lights were out, and Chester and Marion vanished through the box door.

The last she saw of him, he was folding Marion's opera cloak about her with a tenderness that befitted their long-delayed honeymoon.

There would be no kiss on Lucia's lips this night, cool and dewy as a rose-leaf. Ah, well, to-morrow blue water and a lessening line upon the sky; the old life drifting far astern, and the new life beckoning her from beyond the wave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PROFESSOR and Mrs. Schroeder made but a brief tarry in Great Britain; but Lucia, who fell in with pleasant travelling acquaintances, contrary to her original plans made the tour of the islands, and crossing to Paris, lingered out the summer season in the south of France. She was not naturally an idler; so, though most of her waking hours were given to mere sight-seeing and enjoyment, she found time also, to gather up some stray facts of history, art, and language. In these varied occupations, a nature so buoyant and elastic as hers could not fail to find solace and enjoyment. Yet at the bottom of it all lay the still unanswered questions—What is God? What is life? What is truth? She had learned that the soul was in itself in some sort the master of its destiny; but the effort was full of pain, if, also, full of gladness; and wherefore? It was a question which haunted her on English moors, by Scottish lakes, in the galleries of the Louvre, and made sad the soft sunsets of Pyrrhenean valleys.

In the early autumn she rejoined the Schroeders. She was just in season to be introduced to the family of Professor Schroeder's father, with whom she was to spend the winter, before the return of her friends to America.

"Give my love to dear Madam Bernstein," she said

to Mrs. Schroeder, at the parting, "and tell her that Noah's dove is still upon the wing — has found no rest for the sole of her foot."

She soon discovered that she was going to be pleased with her winter quarters. The ancient, quaint, and picturesque aspect of the town; the simple, tranquil manners of its people; its treasures of art and science, in which everybody had a quiet pride, and in which everybody seemed to take a vital and personal interest, that had a sense of proprietorship about it — all challenged her liking. Dr. Schroeder was connected with the University. Of the sons, one, Adolph, was a sculptor, while the girls, Irma and Ursula, were excellent botanists, and assisted their father in preparing his scientific lectures. It was a charming household, and Lucia felt, from the first, that it was to be to her a sort of ark of refuge.

Lucia was of an active habit, and never tired of outdoor life. She speedily made herself acquainted with the topography of the city and the nomenclature of its main thoroughfares, and, armed with a good conversational use of the language, she used to set out upon long journeys alone through markets, and bookstores, and print-shops. One day she strolled through the parks, on another she plunged down by-streets and alleys, and made friends with the people, for she was of a frank nature, and never hesitated to ask questions when there was a point of knowledge to be obtained thereby.

It happened, one day, that, crossing an ancient quarter of the town, as a short cut home after a suburban ramble; her attention was arrested by a curious cortege upon the streets. It was evidently a funeral procession. The coffin, which was that of an adult, was borne upon

a rude-litter by eight women. The followers, who seemed not to be mourners in the ordinary sense of the word, but who yet were very sorrowful, and some even weeping, were also women, clad in sober costume, with only now and then, as if by chance, a bit of tawdry finery displayed. In the whole cortege was not a man, an old woman, nor a little child.

"What is it?" she asked of a respectable-looking woman who was passing.

"The funeral of a Magdalen," was the answer. "They are going to Christ's Hospital."

"Might one follow?" asked Lucia.

"Undoubtedly," replied the woman, "if one chooses."

It was said with an air of slight contempt, subdued, however, by a certain sort of respect.

Lucia went on, wondering what sort of an institution Christ's Hospital might be — a hospital for the lame, the maimed, the blind, the demon-possessed, the Magdalen, the social outcast? That was her query, and it hit the truth exactly.

In three or four squares they reached the house. It was simply a very ancient dwelling, situated upon a street which had once made some pretensions, but was now grown dingy and old-fashioned. As the funeral procession approached, the gate of the court-yard swung open to admit it.

Looking across the pavement to the open doorway, Lucia saw standing therein, as if to bid the body of the poor outcast welcome, a benevolent-looking man of perhaps forty-five. His long, yellow hair lay upon his shoulders, giving to his heavy and rather plain features an apostolic air. His forehead was massive, his eye blue and penetrating. It was only about the

mouth and chin that one discovered traces of great gentleness and sweetness—an expression of almost divine pity and love. In person he was stout, but not above medium height; a man not dignified, except in that inevitable sense of majesty which attends a nature strong, and just, and merciful.

About the court-yard, into which the sun was shining full and broad, and also about the wide entrance-hall, were scattered at will, paupers of that degree of misery into which the mercy of the state never descends; men ruined and shattered from vicious lives; women and little children afflicted with goitre; young girls who had gone astray, but who, here, under the watchful eye of a strong and judicious matron, might hope to regain some vantage-ground of usefulness to their race; all sorts of wretched, sin-sick, suffering humanity.

The cortege, as if perfectly knowing the way, filed into what had evidently been at some time a stately drawing-room, but which was now fitted up as a sort of impromptu chapel. Here preparations had been made to receive it, and the coffin was rested while the strange mourners ranged themselves around it in chairs placed for them. Lucia, who had followed them into the chapel, sat a little apart from the rest, but where she still had a full view of the pastor, if pastor he were. He wore no robes, and she judged him to occupy no real clerical station; yet, after a short prayer, and a solemn requiem, performed by an unseen choir, he opened the Bible and read the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Closing the book and looking around upon the company gathered before him, he proceeded to offer a short and simple exhortation. It was not elo-

quent, in the ordinary sense of the term; it was just a true and tender word spoken out of a loving heart, a heart which knew the sorrows and the sadness that had come to him not to be assuaged, — both he and they knew that that was not possible, — but simply to be recognized. No church in that great Christian city would give that dead outcast room within its portals for a decent burial service. But here was one who simply followed the Master, who had fitted up this small chapel for the sole purpose that she, and such as she, might have recognition in death, as having belonged to the race for whom Christ died.

When the exhortation was over, the girls were weeping, not violently, but with that deep, hopeless sadness which is most touching to witness. But they subdued their grief, and ranging themselves again in order, took up their sorrowful burden and bore it away. In going out, Lucia was obliged to pass before the pastor, and she bowed courteously. He returned the salutation, and something in his face made it impossible for her to leave him without an explanation.

“I am a stranger in your city, sir,” she said; “an American. I happened by accident to be passing as the funeral approached your door, and strayed in here out of curiosity. I have been deeply interested, and, I trust, have given no offence.”

“None whatever, I assure you,” he said. “I am happy to bid you welcome. I hold a sort of social service here, also, every Sunday, to which a few people come of a better sort than these you see about me now. Next Sunday I shall give my little flock a few thoughts suggested by this, to me, familiar scene — the burial of a Magdalen. If you feel any interest in the subject, I

should be glad to have you come and consider it with us."

"Thank you," she said, upon the impulse of the moment; "I shall certainly come."

She thought of this strange scene all the way homeward. At tea she was unusually silent. It was not a topic which she could broach before the assembled family. But during the evening she drew Frau Schroeder apart, and related to her the circumstances, and asked, with some misgiving, if what she had done had been amiss.

"Certainly a little unusual," replied Frau Schroeder, "but not necessarily amiss. It was Pastor Emanuel, a most excellent, though very eccentric man. He is not in reality a clergyman, but of more than clerical purity and sacredness of life, and is adored among the poorer classes. He has also a following among the higher ranks. He is himself of noble family, and if you choose to go to his Sunday gathering, there can be no serious objection. Indeed, as one of the curiosities of the town, perhaps he is worth your study."

Frau Schroeder was a stickler for proprieties; so Lucia felt quite re-enforced by her evident toleration of Pastor Emanuel and his eccentricities. She gathered, however, more from her manner than her words, that she would prefer that her daughters should not be implicated in this running after strange doctrines; and Lucia therefore made no mention of her plans, but on Sunday, with sturdy American independence, trudged off to the chapel of Pastor Emanuel by herself.

CHAPTER XXV.

As she entered, the little audience was already assembled, and Pastor Emanuel, who was on the floor of the chapel talking with a knot of gentlemen, seeing her, advanced to greet her. His manner was as unclerical as ever, and the company had not at all the appearance of formal church-goers, but rather of friends, who, separated by the labors of the week, met here on Sunday morning upon a common ground of friendly interest, and sympathy in views and doctrines, a little apart from those held by the rest of the world.

Pastor Emanuel greeted Lucia in excellent English.

"I am very glad to see you," he said. "I have thought about your face often since you were here, and have wondered if you would come again."

"O," said Lucia, "I was sure to keep my promise. To tell the truth, I have a belief that you have something in store for me,—for me especially. Do you share the popular contempt for presentiments?"

"Ah, you have presentiments — have you?" he said, with an evasive smile. "Well, we shall see. Perhaps I *have* something for you."

He looked at his watch. It was time for the exercises to commence, and with a bow he left her and ascended the platform.

There was first a hymn and then a prayer, and after-

wards a few words of introduction to the somewhat unusual subject-matter of his discourse. And then followed a sermon, which, long as it is, I have transferred almost entirely to these pages, because it forms the key-note of an after-experience which Lucia always regarded as the most momentous of her life.

The text of the discourse was the simple announcement, God is Love. In a few brief paragraphs the speaker touched upon the mysterious, and to all the ages unfathomable, relations between men and women as such. The problem, always vexatious and insoluble, had assumed, however, in these later times, vast proportions, and threatened the undermining of society; but, like every other mystery in the universe, there was a key to it in the everlasting principles of life; and to find this key was a most worthy and interesting study.

"And," said the speaker, "since the wit of man is plainly at fault, let us go back, as the prophets and reformers of all time have done, to revelation, certain that in some of those pregnant *words of God*, which the ages have cherished and immortalized, we may find the hint we need.

"*God is Love*. That grand axiom of the creation has a trite sound in our ears; yet it is possible that we may never have fathomed its meaning. We consider it, usually, as a revelation concerning the divine Being; we have seldom thought to read the proposition backwards, and so find out what Love is; what, in reality, is the characteristic essence of that attribute of the human soul which intuitively, and without reference to scriptural authority, men everywhere call the divine passion. In the light of this revelation, what, then, is love? What is God, if not the Creator? What is

love, if not the life-giver; the creative principle incarnated in matter, and developing in detail those great conceptions which the Infinite Creator stamped upon his forming universe? Under different names and disguises, we may track it through the whole universe of mind and matter. It is cohesion in atoms, attraction between spheres: for the pure and mystic marriages of plants and flowers we have no name. When the souls of men and women are fused by its divine agency, we crown it Love. Thus everywhere, from atoms to planets, from pale-eyed blossoms of the spring, whose life is a breath, and passeth away as a vapor, to the indestructible, undying soul of man, all life, all being, has its origin in Love. By whatever name you choose to call that passion which is the opposite pole of love, whether hatred, repulsion, what not, it is still a disintegrator. It can never create; it can only destroy. There is no other principle in the universe upon which any real enduring life can be built up, but that of attraction, aggregation, love.

“In studying to find a remedy for those disorders of society which spring out of the perversion of this principle, it clears the subject of many difficulties to remember that love, being always, in one form or other, God, life-giving, life-conserving, there can never be too much of it in the world. Nay, the whole philosophy of human progress, through all the ages, testifies that the great final end of this material creation is, that it may be, at last, by all manner of devious, yet still divine, agencies, penetrated, interfused, swallowed up in, and wholly conquered unto, this divine principle. It is as if God, the eternal Spirit, were seeking, in every age, more and more to incarnate himself in the material

universe. And always the principle upon which this divine, stupendous union progresses is the principle of love. Let us, therefore, repress our sneers, give up our scepticism, throw to the winds our weak, cowardly fears, certain that whatever progeny of evil it may seem to bring in its train, it will surely rise, at last, superior to all its negations and short-comings, and lift all human souls into diviner atmospheres and infinite elysiums.

“There can be no adequate comprehensive philosophy of human life which does not include, nay, cheerfully embrace, the phenomena of evil. The seeker after truth, who is not prepared to accept this negative manifestation of the life or love principle as a part of the divine plan, may as well content himself with half results at once. On a near view, its agency is, no doubt, appalling; but as the field of vision broadens, stretches out into the infinite realms of brightness, regularity, order, the law of the universe vindicates itself even in the darkest realm of Lucifer, and we gladly acknowledge that

‘He, too, is God’s minister,
And labors for some good
By us not (fully) understood.’

“There can be no finer illustration of the progressive unfolding and clearing up of truth than is presented by the history of the principle of love. In the earliest stages of the race, when man was characterized by a strongly developed animal nature, enclosing, as the husk envelops the seed, the spiritual nature, this principle, though manifesting itself with tremendous energy and power, yet operated almost altogether on the

lower or sensual plane. Purity, as distinguished from license, found only a feeble setting forth in the primitive idea of marriage. It was wrong for the woman to be unfaithful to her husband; it was wrong for the man to covet another man's wife. But a man might take his own sister to wife, or he might multiply his wives as the sands of the sea-shore, if he chose. From a woman no virtue was expected save that of simple obedience to her husband; not even fidelity, since the husband might bestow her upon another man if he chose; and she had no recourse but submission.

"Yet this license was perfectly true to its time. The new creation was waste; the power to make it fruitful was hidden in the physical attributes of man. The solitudes of this roughly outlined world were immense and awful. Society there was none. Church, state, commerce, enterprise, all these were ideas still unconceived. The hills and valleys cried to God for life, human life, to possess them, to cultivate them, to make the wilderness to blossom as the rose. To increase and multiply upon the face of the earth was, literally, the first command of the divine to the human nature. It was the divine itself which thus sought, perpetually, through physical forms, union, harmony, the evolution of new life-germs from the coalescing of opposing forces; the opening everywhere of gateways for the rushing tides of the higher upon the lower life. As fire, and earthquake, and volcano, and whirlwind, were all necessary to conform the crust of the earth to those shapes which suited the divine purpose, and as, therefore, all these fearfully discordant agencies had, at last, their perfect and complete relation to the divine harmony of the universe, so, in a higher realm, the fear-

ful irregularities, the terrible outbursts of violence and disorder, which even yet make the records of that early time to glow with a lurid and awful light, came fully within the scope of the divine purpose and agencies."

After a slight sketch of the utter corruption and disorganization of society in pagan times, the speaker continued:—

"But with the advent of Christianity came a great influx of life and light. The entire revolution, which the teachings of Christ were calculated to produce in the methods of thought, and habits of life, of the race, cannot be adequately comprehended until one has a clear insight into the heart of the old Jewish and pagan world. It was a world utterly subject to the senses. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, had been more or less vividly apprehended by a few rare spirits, but to the masses of mankind this world was all for pleasure or enjoyment. Sheol and Hades, the abodes of disembodied spirits, were gloomy regions, which offered no allurements to the beauty-loving soul of man. All that spiritual light and glory which we associate with heaven, all those visions of immortal beauty and perfection which draw our aspirations upward, and give to the soul wings to soar above the fascinations of flesh and sense, had no existence for those imperfectly developed races. This world was all, and it was ruled by fear. The two doctrines which outweigh all others in the teaching of Christ are, the never-ending spiritual life and the omnipotence of love. Truly, it was a new dispensation which had dawned.

"The soul of Christ was not, as many conceive, cold, austere, or barren. No woman ever washed the

feet of such a man with her tears, or wiped them with the hairs of her head. The tenderness of Christ for fallen women has been the wonder of the world for two thousand years. The truth is, that he recognized in them humble representatives of a divine principle; and Christ came, not to denounce love in any form, but to lift its weary feet out of the miry clay, and place them on firm ground; to breathe upon its tarnished wings till they should glow with heavenly light and glory, and bear themselves aloft into their native skies. In the evolution of truth there are many degrees, but no antagonisms; and the vilest of fallen women is only the lowest round of a ladder which reaches straight up to the heart of God."

There were some practical illustrations of the true Christ methods of dealing with social vice, — methods which must be forever based upon those strong apostolic exhortations which sweep through the inmost chambers of the heart, and purge out, as with the besom of destruction, every secret and besetting sin, after which the speaker concluded in the following words:—

"I have been told in all seriousness, and that by ministers of the gospel, that to combat licentiousness was to fight a windmill; that the evil would never be conquered; that men would never be brought to see that license is not love; that wrongful indulgence brings certain ruin; that purity and fidelity are better than unbridled desire and covetous possession. How dare such clergymen stand up in Christian pulpits, and, lifting their faces to God, pray, 'Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven'? Every true prayer is a prophecy; and when the Spirit of God has put it into the heart of humanity to cry out in

strains like those of our Lord's Prayer, infinite intentions stand revealed; and I know that the day will surely come when over this whole round earth not one soul shall be held to unlawful bondage in the blasphemed name of love. And the miracle will be wrought by no special interposition of the divine arm, but by the faithful living of true men and women; the slow rising of humanity out of the deep, dark night of ignorance and error into the broad effulgence of universal wisdom and love. Already the rays of morning gild the mountain tops; already the hearts of women grow warm towards the sinful and suffering of their own sex, and many noble men, lifting their souls above the brutality and license which have come down to them — a most ignoble inheritance — from the past, live lives as pure as those which they require of their sisters and wives, *and are not ashamed of it.*

“A nature that is thoroughly imbued with a love that is worthy of its high origin in the bosom of the eternal Father is in that moment redeemed. As God is the central jewel of a great cluster set in the midst of his works, truly to shine by their light, yet by his own outshining all, so love, the source and centre of an harmonious character, and that without which it cannot possibly exist, is never truly love till honor, courage, candor, fidelity, ay, and heavenly aspiration, surround, and ennoble, and adorn it.

“Can a soul aflame with such a love as this, or even a soul that, with true prophetic insight, awaits the kindling moment of such a love, descend, meantime, to sickly sentimentalism, to weak and flippant burlesques of love? Can it drag its heavenly plumes through the mud, and mire, and filth, of streets and brothels? Can

it, even in the moment of sublime, august fruition, talk paltry nonsense of mine and thine, of spheres and rights? Never! True love looks ever upward, and drowns all shadows of selfishness in the infinite light. The man looks upward to the woman, and sees heaven only in the shining of her eyes; and the woman looks up to heaven, and in some dim, inexplicable way sees in the great Oversoul bending tenderly above her, only her lover's face. And be sure the Infinite is never jealous, if only through this human passion is the highest idea of the divine realized, for it is the order in which he has set the souls of men and women as he has set the stars in theirs. It is so that the Father makes himself one with his children in the deepest, most intimate, and divinest experience of their lives."

CHAPTER XXVI.

LUCIA listened to the pastor as to one inspired. Here was a man who had drunk from deeper fountains than any her soul had tasted. Here were living waters, and she could never rest until she had slaked her thirst. In that moment she came to see how inspiration is measured by the finiteness of man, rather than by the infiniteness of God. The rain falleth from the heavens indeed, but very good to the dwellers on the arid plains are the springs which reach no higher than the hills. Next to the voice of God speaking to one's own soul, which few perhaps ever hear in this life, is the voice of God heard in the echoes of another's consciousness. Here, at any rate, Lucia felt, was a message for her; and no scruples of worldly propriety should stand between her and it. At the conclusion of the service, she went forward to speak to the pastor. "My presentiment is fulfilled," she said. "You *had* a message for me; but this is not all of it. I must see you again."

He turned his deep blue eyes penetratingly upon her face. She met the glance with fearless openness and truth. Pastor Emanuel was a man conversant with the ways of the world, deeply versed in the mysteries of the human heart. Himself a nature full of magnetic impulse, he had long ago learned enough

of the laws which govern such natures to know that it is absolutely necessary, not only to the peace of society, but to the integrity, the self-conservation of the individual, that they should be guarded at every point. This was by no means the first time that his rare force of mind and soul had attracted to him personally the regards of women. Often they were mere moths, glad to flutter in any flame, so their pale lives were warmed and made to glow. Now and then they were natures so shattered by stress of storm, that they made such a port as this in their distress with the simple gladness and humility of the shipwrecked and almost drowned, who find shelter, and food, and repose; or they might be sharp adventurers of sentiment, in search of a new sensation. The moths he could deal with, and the shipwrecked he could succor; the adventurers usually found their sensation, and were glad to make off with it; but what sort of soul was it that looked at him out of these eager, hungry eyes, that yet were as fearless as the eyes of a sea-bird, as pure as a beam of the dawn?

"Are you in trouble?" he asked.

"Outwardly, no," she answered. "It is only that my soul is astray, and in want of God; and it seems to me that you have found his abiding-place."

"I think you told me you were American?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Resident here?"

"For the winter only; I am visiting the family of Dr. Schroeder."

"Ah," he said, apparently favorably impressed by the communication, "the good doctor knows me very well. He will not be afraid to trust his guest to my

direction. I never pay social visits; but across the hall you will notice, as you go out, my study, the door of which is always open. I receive there all who come to me. Will you be one of my guests?"

"Most gladly," she said.

An appointment was made, and Lucia bade the pastor adieu, and left the chapel. Passing out, she observed what she knew must be the study—an ample and well-furnished room, opening from the entrance hall by a broad, arched doorway, in which was no door. The size of the room secured privacy to conversation, and the servant who constantly patrolled the hall prevented intrusion; but there was no nook or corner in all the apartment where an impropriety might conceal itself.

"It is my confessional," Pastor Emanuel was wont to say, grimly, to his inquiring friends. "Here wants and woes of all sorts are poured into my ear by all who choose to come to me. I guard myself against evil designs, guard also my penitents against the possible surprises of their own hearts, by the simple contrivance of an open door."

One morning, early in the week, Lucia entered the study, announced by the servant in waiting. Pastor Emanuel, who was sitting at his table, reading, rose and greeted her politely, and offered her a chair by the fire.

She accepted it, and feeling perfectly at her ease, made a desultory remark about the weather, or something equally irrelevant. But Pastor Emanuel, in these study conferences, never suffered himself to be drawn into social chat. He went directly about the work in hand. He was standing, with his back to the fire, and

his hands behind him, regarding her with a serious expression of countenance.

"What is your hereditary faith?" he asked.

"Indeed," she replied, "we in America can scarcely be said to have an hereditary faith. Everything is mobile and shifting there, and one's religious ideas do not escape the influence. We read a good deal, and compare ideas, and the process modifies our creed, till at last faith is apt to wither, and perhaps die out altogether, like a flower from too much transplanting."

"So you, too, poor child, are afflicted with 'the endless malady of thought,'" he said, looking at her, Lucia thought, a little quizzically. "May I, then, ask what you have read?"

She blushed a little. "My reading has been so desultory," she said, "that I am almost afraid to set it in array before a mind so philosophical as yours. You will be sure to laugh at it."

"Very well. God laughs in heaven, the old writers say, and I am inclined to believe it. I don't see how he can well help it, sometimes. You are not afraid of a laugh, I hope."

"No," she replied, with equal good humor. "Since I have a profound conviction that you are to help me, I shall not readily be laughed out of the effort to set all my perplexities plainly before you. But concerning my reading, the main difficulty is to know how to classify it."

"If you do not object to being catechized, permit me a few questions. You have read the *Leben Jesu*, perhaps."

"Oh, yes; and Renan's Life of Christ, besides."

The pastor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of them?"

"In the case of Dr. Strauss," she said, "I have, of course, nothing to oppose to his scholarship; but it still seems to me there is a region of thought open, not only to my soul, but to the soul of every humble, earnest lover of spiritual truth, which he never enters at all. It is a question of historical evidence and intellectual conviction with him, and the Christ, if there be a Christ, is not so to be apprehended. At least, there is where he fails to satisfy me."

"Very good. And Renan?"

"Why, Renan is worse yet. He sentimentalizes. I quite agree with the wit who said that Renan, not satisfied with making Jesus a man, had made him a Frenchman, as well."

"You have studied the philosophers? You know something of Comte and Proudhon?"

"Only enough of Comte to think his scientific basis unsound; but his idea of the perfectibility of human life appears to me admirable, and worthy of profound consideration. As for Proudhon, there is certainly a method in his madness. When he says, for instance, that 'God is evil,' I understand him to mean that the Source of all good, so far as material vision can perceive, is that rudimentary condition called evil, out of which only and always good is evolved. When he says that 'property is theft,' I recognize also the shell of a truth whose inner kernel few souls rightly apprehend. And even when he affirms that the true form of government is anarchy, I agree with him so far as to concede that motion is better than stagnation; the resolution of the old the necessary condition of the evolution of the new."

"And Herbert Spencer?"

"I do not worship Spencer. I wonder at, rather than admire, the comprehensiveness of his genius. To tell the truth, I fear I have not the Spencerian profundity of intellect in sufficient measure to enjoy his plunges into the abyss, and so perhaps I ought to class him as an author to me 'unknowable.'"

The pastor smiled, and laid his finger aside his nose. "Pardon me," he said, "but your great American nation does turn out some queer specimens of woman-kind."

His look was so genial and hearty, that she did not feel in the least offended.

"Let us go on," he said. "You must, no doubt, have some acquaintance with Darwin, and his compeers of the scientific world?"

"I know just enough of Darwin," she said, "not to feel at all shocked if it should eventually appear that not Adam, but an ascidian, was our great progenitor; in fact, evolution appears to me to be a grand and mighty thought, too grand not to be a thought of God; and yet, in its details, I can but regard Mr. Darwin's conclusion as not proved. There will come a better light by and by on many points, I think."

"What about protoplasm?"

"The theory of the physical basis of life doesn't weigh with me at all," she said. "I can't see that the best lights of science shine to the bottom of that well. Biology teaches us that not even a flower can nourish itself from unrelated matter; there must be electrical union before there can be life, and the secrets of that union no man has penetrated. Some thoughts of yours last Sunday would bear being carried out in that direction, I think; and, by the way, I must quote for

you a stanza from one of our American poets, bearing on your theme:—

“‘Love is the root of creation, God’s essence; worlds without number

Lie in his bosom like children; he made them for this purpose only:

Only to love, and to be loved again.’”

“Ah,” he said, “that is good; however, it is your Longfellow’s translation of the Swedish Bishop Tegner’s poem. You must not claim all the good things for America.”

“Pardon,” she said; “you are right. But, to go back to the scientific men. The fact is, that they have unsettled my faith in authority, till it ends in my having very little faith in themselves as authority. They are always wrangling and disagreeing, and at the best there remains the doubt whether, after all, they have exhausted observation, and whether they have generalized correctly. Two ideas remain firm in my mind, however, in spite of all things—the ideas of God and Soul.”

“Let us be thankful for that,” said the pastor. “I hate to meet man or woman who seriously doubts either, since I am then aware that there must be something wrong fundamentally—organically, so to speak.”

“But I have had my doubts. Not lately, however. When you asked for my hereditary faith, I should have told you that my father, dying, charged me to find my soul. I searched for years. I found it, at last, but I found it in hell.”

“Good,” said the pastor. “That is the best thing yet; you have gotten your soul out of hell, I perceive. *How did you do it?*”

"Oh! I built up a little system of my own, a mere plank here and there, that lifted me out of the pit. I began by saying that my soul was of God, and that God could not be selfish; so one could not live the divine life and be selfish. Then I went on to lay it down as an axiom, that God, who must always be represented to human consciousness by its own ultimate conceptions of what is true and good; that is, the best thing we can think about,—that, to us, is God,—could not be weak; must, in fact, be infinitely strong; and so on, till I got my feet out of the clay; but that is all that I have been able to do. Spiritualism has helped me a good deal, however."

He opened his eyes, with a comical expression.

"What!" he said, "a spiritualist, with all the rest, and versed, no doubt, in clairvoyance, mesmerism, psychology, and the like! Next you will be telling me that you have been in love with some other woman's husband."

She blushed scarlet.

"It is true," she said; "I have been, but that is over now."

"Over?" he asked; "how is that? You no longer love him?"

"I no longer love him selfishly," she said. "Not to love what is grand, and strong, and true, and pure, would be to wrong my own nature; but my love no longer craves selfish appropriation. In the best sense, he is mine. In no other sense do I covet him."

He was regarding her fixedly. "It is a soul worth saving," he said, as if to himself.

He went to a book-shelf, and, taking down a volume, read aloud to her,—

“‘Nor aught, nor naught existed, yon bright sky
 Was not, nor Heaven’s broad roof outstretched above.
 What covered all? what sheltered? what concealed?
 Was it the water’s fathomless abyss?
 There was not death, yet was there naught immortal.
 There was no confine betwixt day and night;
 The only One breathed breathless by itself!
 Other than it there nothing since has been.
 Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
 In gloom profound, an ocean without light.
 The germ that still lay covered in the husk
 Burst forth one nature from the fervent heat.
Then first came love upon it, the new spring
Of mind — yea, poets in their hearts discerned,
Pondering this bond between created things
And uncreated. Comes this spark from earth,
 Piercing and all-pervading, or from heaven?
 Then seeds were sown, and mighty powers arose,
 Nature below, and power and will above.
 Who knows the secret, who proclaimed it here,
 Whence, whence this manifold creation sprang?
 The gods themselves came later into being.
 Who knows from whence this great creation sprang?
 He from whom all this great creation sprang,
 Whether his will created or was mute,
 The Most High seer, that is in highest heaven;
 He knows it — or perchance even he knows not.’

“There,” he said, “the human mind had reached that point five thousand years ago. What more can the profoundest science, the wisest philosophy, of to-day contribute to the solution of your mystery? Nay, the piercing pathos of that wail, ‘Perchance even He knows not,’ is not old, but very new. The philosophers of to-day are re-echoing it in even sadder accents.”

“I have read it before,” she said, “but it never so impressed me before.”

"You are then acquainted with the Rig Veda," he said, again with that quizzical look. "You have read it, perhaps, in the original Sanscrit."

"No," she replied, half vexed, yet laughing. "Dr. Max Müller has spared us, in a measure, the trouble of acquiring Sanscrit. I see," she added, "that you think my mind a perfect intellectual scrap-bag. I shall not deny it. I own, besides, to a good deal of curiosity to know what you will make of it."

"There was only one Power," he said, quite soberly, "that could bring order out of chaos. To that Power you must come at last for a solution of your mysteries."

"Oh, if you could lead me to him," she said.

"Patience, my child; have patience, and I promise to bring you to his very presence. You have studied mathematics?"

"Yes."

"You know, then, that even a mathematical demonstration is founded upon axiomatic truth; please to consider, besides, that in natural science nothing can be done until the evidence of the senses is admitted as authority. That marks the limitation of the finite mind; on every hand it feels its boundary. In material things, in matters of every-day life, we learn these boundaries perfectly, and come at last to recognize them almost by intuition. But in spiritual matters we still grope like babes, and it is easy for the materialist to confound the average seeker after spiritual truth by the seemingly authoritative edict, 'Prove it!' when, perhaps, the matter is as incapable of scientific proof as the fact that the less is not equal to the greater. You cannot prove that a curved line is more beautiful than a straight one, except as the experience of the finest

minds, the best judges in all ages, attests it; it is not a self-evident proposition; it is supported only by indirect testimony; not all the witnesses agree, yet we hold the proof conclusive, and accept the fact as established. But if beauty may be proved by such a process, a thousand-fold stronger is the evidence in favor of religion. The universal soul of man proclaims, *There is a God*; has always proclaimed it; predicates also his superiority to man, and dictates to man, worship. These, then, are positions which we have a right to take for granted in spiritual investigations, just as surely as the student in art has the right to assert that a curved line is more beautiful than a straight one, or as the student of science has a right to say, that when the senses declare a thing to be hot, it is hot, and not cold; or round, it is round, and not square.

"If any man chooses to dissent from any of these propositions,—and many men have dissented from them all,—it rests upon him to prove that he is right, and the majority of mankind wrong. But atheists are never *provers*; they always assume the attitude of doubters—an attitude which is shifting and unstable from the start. After the being of God, the next point which materialists attack is his personality. If there be a God, say they, all that we can know of him is what is expressed in law—the law and order of the universe; that is God. But what is law? Simply a stated order of doing things. Law is the result of intelligence; but is it intelligence? It is the result of will; but is it will? It is the result of beneficence; but is it beneficence? If you answer these questions in the affirmative, I agree with you, that the universe sprang from law, only I choose to call that intelligence,

that will, that beneficence, by the name of God. But if law is not actually intelligence, will, beneficence, but only the stated, uniform manner in which these forces act, then, by all philosophy, this great, stupendous result, the universe, must still have had a cause, and that cause I call God; and I say that law is the stated, uniform manner of his acting.

“But if God is governed by law, say the philosophers, prayer, and praise, and worship are alike futile. Nothing that man can do can possibly affect this great system of universal law; neither will God change or modify it at the behest of his creature. Has God, then, built a cage, and shut himself up in it? Has he forged a chain, and bound it about his own person? Let me read you the shortest and strongest argument which I know against this objection of the materialists. It is from your English professor, Huxley. He did not mean it to be used in this service, but that is no matter. He is talking about what he chooses to call catastrophism and uniformitarianism as rival theories concerning geologic truth; and this is what he says:—

“To my mind there appears to be no sort of necessary and theoretical antagonism between catastrophism and uniformitarianism. On the contrary, it is very conceivable that catastrophies may be part and parcel of uniformity. Let me illustrate my case by analogy. The working of a clock is a model of uniform action; good time-keeping *means* uniformity of action. But the striking of a clock is essentially a catastrophe. The hammer might be made to blow up a barrel of gunpowder. The clock, instead of striking at regular intervals, might strike at all sorts of periods, never twice alike in the intervals, force, or number of its

blows. Nevertheless, all these irregular and apparently lawless catastrophes would be the result of an absolutely uniformitarian action, and we might have two schools of theorists, one studying the hammer, and the other the pendulum.'

"Now, if he had added that most clocks are — and all clocks might be — so constructed that the maker can cause them to strike *whenever he pleases*, I cannot see but the argument would fairly cover all that we claim in the matter of the freedom of the relation between God and man, and leave the scientist or pendulum theorists without a word to throw at the religionists, or hammer-people."

"Certainly it seems to be a demonstration," said Lucia, "that the universe *might have been* constructed upon principles that would admit of answers to prayer, without detriment to the regularity and order of its operations."

"Please to observe, my child, that this is all that is needed. When it comes to the matter of experience and testimony, the evidence is all on the side of the theory that prayer *may* be answered. The fact that *all* prayers are *not* answered, only proves — what no one need deny — that the *laws* of prayer are not yet so fully understood that the human heart can always comply with the necessary conditions."

"Then you believe prayer to be governed by law," said Lucia.

"Undoubtedly I do, and rejoice in the belief. The world managed to get along for several thousand years, and build, and plant, and sow, and reap, and gather into barns, without understanding the law of gravitation, except in what scientific people would

call a poor, practical manner. Men had no theory at all about it, except that if you left a thing without support, it would fall. Still, it was a blessed revelation when Newton discovered the law. We are still very much in the same state of ignorance concerning what may be called the law of ascending gravitation, the law by which all things rise, that law by which all spiritual forces tend to their centre, God; but the light will come. Till then we must get on as our ancestors have, satisfied with that knowledge which comes from experience that there *is* a road, more or less an open road, as the case may be, from the heart of every child of humanity to the heart of God.

“You have spoken of spiritualism. When the laws of spirit, as disengaged from what we call matter, are fully established, I believe it will be found true that no deep cry of need can go out from any human soul upon the spiritual spheres, without creating there a disturbance like that which, when the Aurora flames up in the northern sky, sets all the needles of a thousand compasses in motion. For the spiritual world, as apart from the great Father of all, is made up of unnumbered souls, akin, each one of them, to our own. When we think of humanity, from the beginning down, as still sentiently existent, it seems to the imagination like one great globe, lying half in darkness, half in light, and neither half complete without the other. And above and within this immeasurable mass of sentient existence palpitates forever the mighty, loving heart of God; and through the medium of sympathies and affections, emotions common to all human souls, whether in the flesh or out of it, as the cry of prayer goes out upon the spheres, the tides of

love, and joy, and helpfulness, and healing, come rushing back, and human nature is renewed and strengthened from the great source and fountain from which it originally flowed. Men always ask with amazement which is half awe whence come the fortitude, the magnanimity, the splendid heroism, which moments of great danger develop in aspiring souls. We shall live to learn that it comes through the law of sympathy, in answer to the soul's outcry, from the unseen or spiritual world, and that they who succumb to evil and become examples of cowardice are oftenest they who fail to call on the spiritual world for the help which they need."

"And I can see," said Lucia, "that the simple substitution of this law of unseen spiritual co-operation would answer difficulties and objections of many kinds. By such agencies the course of events might be constantly changed, and the will of higher powers constantly wrought in human affairs. But what a field of inquiry and speculation is thus opened to human investigation!"

"Yes, and it is a field destined, in the not distant future, to be ably occupied. But we must creep before we walk. We must learn the fundamental laws of matter before we can grapple with the mysteries of spirit; only, in the mean time, let us not deny that these mysteries exist, but go humbly and reverently forward in the way marked out for us by the Father's unerring wisdom."

"It grows late, and I must go home," said Lucia. "We have said so much, and yet so little! but I feel stronger and more settled in my mind."

"You will come to me again, I hope," said Pastor

Emanuel. "For to-day we have only discussed three points: that God is; that he has a personality, for you cannot predicate love, will (or conscious choice), and wisdom of an abstraction; that his relations with man are free. Will you think about those things during this coming week, and then return to me?"

"Ah," said Lucia, a little wearily, "it is hard groping in the dark. Why have we not some certain guide, some sure authority? I wish I could believe in a Bible, and a Church, and a Savior. It would rest me so."

The pastor looked into her face and smiled, but said nothing — nothing, at least, which expressed the thought which lay behind that smile.

"We have reason and conscience," he said, "and the constant, helpful inflow of that spirit towards which we all tend. Is not that enough?"

"Yes," she said, "enough for the head. I don't mind tiring my brain out with these wearisome questionings, if only there be a place where the heart might rest."

He looked upon her with compassionate tenderness in his eyes.

"Not yet," he said, as if to himself; "not yet." Then, addressing her, he added, "Go home, and tire your brain once more with thinking of these things. Come back next week, at this same time, and tell me what is the result."

"I will," she said, looking up, and smiling from eyes lucent with tears. "And whatever comes of it, I thank you for your goodness. That helps me, too."

He smiled again, and bade her good day, and she went out upon the street full of troubled thought.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE busy habit of Lucia's mind was not to be restrained by the leisure of her circumstances. She entered into the occupations and pursuits of the Schroeder family with a ready zest and sympathy which won her at once their affectionate regard. Music, birds, and flowers absorbed the young ladies; and Lucia felt herself attracted by their characters not less than their pursuits. They were both coy, yet thoroughly self-possessed; sufficiently animated and vivacious in the privacy of domestic life, yet manifesting a calm dignity and reserve in the presence of strangers, which Lucia often envied. Irma was the more fascinating, Ursula the more lovable, and both were delightful companions to Lucia, who had never known the pleasure of a sister's society, and had seldom been so situated that she had made intimate friends among women. But, better than all, she loved Frau Schroeder. She was not in the least beautiful, and, except that her fine contralto voice was still in excellent tune, even her accomplishments were grown a little ancient. But she had sound good sense, and a warm, motherly heart, and her whole life was devoted, in the most unselfish manner, to the comfortable task of making her family happy. As for the good doctor, he lived, and moved, and had his being in the charmed circle of her presence.

was not the domestic apparatus only which she fitted with almost whimsical precision to all his tastes and humors; she read for him, she listened for him, she collated and arranged for him, she studied the skies with reference to his appointments, and knew better than a *savant* when the doctor must protect his crotchety throat against an approaching storm.

And next to the doctor, in Frau Schroeder's regard, stood her son Adolph. Adolph was a sad case, and troubled the good Frau not a little. The truth was, he was a genius, and subject to all the infirmities, congenital and acquired, to which that unhappy ilk are doomed. It was a good while before Lucia fairly made his acquaintance, for he was very irregular in his hours, and was not unfrequently absent for several days together. The floor upon which the sleeping-rooms of the house were situated was surmounted by a large garret, which Adolph, who was a sculptor, had appropriated as a studio. In the northern end of it he had arranged a broad window and skylight, for convenience in working, while the remainder of the immense apartment was occupied by models in clay, complete or incomplete, with here and there a finished marble, and here and there specimens of antique art—a Hercules, a Bacchus, a fawn or a satyr—some original, some well-executed copies.

The sculptor had a fancy for busying himself about his room in the early morning hours, and many a morning Lucia had heard above her head the sound of his cheerful song and the stroke of his mallet and chisel, and had wondered to herself what manner of den it was that thus forced her to be conscious of its neighborhood. So little was said, however, about Adolph

in the family, that she never felt free to ask questions, and was at length quite surprised when, one day in the early winter, Frau Schroeder said to her,—

“It is my custom to spend an hour each morning in my son’s studio. I have at last gained his permission to bring you with me, and I should be really glad if you would go. I think it would be a pleasure to you, and I am certain Adolph would be pleased to know you better. Will you do me the favor?”

“Most willingly,” said Lucia; “I shall indeed esteem it a privilege to visit the studio of an artist, who, as I have learned, dear Frau Schroeder, abroad in the town, and not in this house, is an honor to his friends and a pride to his native city.”

Frau Schroeder was well pleased with this compliment, for, indeed, she was proud, as she had a right to be, of her son’s genius.

Frau Schroeder knocked at the door of the studio, and Adolph opened it, looking just a trifle grim. Lucia noticed it, and felt certain then that she owed this pleasure to Frau Schroeder’s solicitation far more than to any personal good-will of the sculptor. But Adolph bowed with a cool and rather dignified grace, and, bidding them welcome, proceeded to do the honors of the studio. Lucia had never thought him handsome before; indeed, if the truth must be confessed, she had judged him to be rather a bear; but now, in his loose-belted blouse and blue cap, with his sturdy arms bared to the elbow, and his broad shoulders well displayed, he was as grand as Hercules. His golden-brown hair curled in thick clusters about his broad white forehead, and though his features were rugged, there was a bright gleam in his eye and a tender curve

about his mobile mouth which were truly fascinating Lucia, watching furtively as he exhibited his treasures, observed to herself that this massive, ungainly creature might have, in a melting moment, the fascination of a — Cupid, she was about to say; and then she laughingly substituted Venus, because there was, after all, something really womanly about him.

He understood his art, too, thoroughly, and Lucia, who was little versed in the antique, listened to him as to a master. This pleased him; and when they had made the tour of the apartment, he said to her, —

“I find it sometimes a bore to talk to visitors, and — shall I confess it? — I rather dreaded you. But your aptness is remarkable, and has made the visit a positive pleasure to me. May I hope that you will sometimes come again with my mother?”

“Indeed,” said Lucia with characteristic frankness, “nothing would please me more. I want some time to see you work. Your art charms me so that I shall never be satisfied till I have in some measure penetrated its mysteries.”

“Oh,” he said, “then you must go to my studio which is in the town. It is there that I have an assistant or two who chip the marble. Here I do little but model. If you would like to witness that process, however, I can easily gratify you.”

He took up a piece of the wet clay, and rapidly, with deft fingers, fashioned for her a rude bust, in miniature, of Mercury, with the cap and wings; so well executed, however, that she recognized it at once.

“Why, what magic is in your touch!” she said. “I could fancy the thing alive; that merry, mocking smile is Mercury himself. But see! a touch or two about

the mouth, and a twist of the wings, to make them cornute, might make a perfect Mephistopheles of it!"

"Why," he said, laughing, "you are not going to prove that you have a genius for the art—are you? Your suggestions are true and genuine, and I must take care, or I shall find in you a rival by and by."

The hour passed rapidly away, and the close of it found Frau Schroeder smiling at the evident success of her little plot.

"You will come again—will you not?" Adolph said, as they prepared to go. "Some day, when you grow a little accustomed to the place, I want you to wet your own fingers in the clay. I think I shall make a pupil of you, yet."

"Thanks!" said Lucia; "but I fear my admiration will stop short of execution. There is so much that you can teach me, however, that I advise you not to make me too welcome."

She went to the studio again and again, and it was not long until she really began to dabble in the clay, and presently developed a very creditable faculty for making portrait busts in miniature. It was a fascinating employment. Adolph erected a little board for her especial use, and hour after hour she sat there patiently working away at her model, and feeling the genuine glow and halo of the art-life all about her.

As for Adolph, he grew suddenly industrious; his habits, after a little, became as regular as those of the *pater familias* himself. There were no more long absences from home, and Frau Schroeder was happy in her heart. Lucia, absorbed in her pursuits, failed to notice the change; or, if she noticed it, it was only to say, as Frau Schroeder herself sometimes said,—

“Adolph has a working fit on. It is well, for he has a commission from Count ——, which it will be to his advantage to execute promptly and well. Adolph has great power — it is only steadiness of purpose that he lacks. May the years bring it to him.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

As the result of a week of thought, and that sort of prayer which is the spontaneous aspiration of the soul, Lucia came back to Pastor Emanuel with one great question working in her mind.

"I was floundering in a morass," she said, "and you have put down three stones for my feet to walk upon, which I find, by trying them, bear my weight quite firmly; but it is still a great ways to the dry ground. I wish you could find a stone called *revelation*, which would do me as good service as these others which you have picked out of the morass. For I notice that you have made none of them. They were all there before, only I had not wit enough to put them in their proper places and order."

"Humph!" he exclaimed, a little gruffly; "why are you so particular that the next stone shall be called *revelation*?"

"Because, if there is a God, and he made us, and is free to act either through law or outside of law, as he chooses, I think he ought to speak to us, and give us that positive knowledge of him which we crave so earnestly."

"He has spoken through the universe."

"Yes, but it takes time, and culture, and capacity,

to learn all that he says through material nature; and the vast majority of mankind are weak, ignorant, and pressed full of the necessary cares of this life."

"But there is the voice of conscience in the soul."

She shook her head and looked discouraged.

"Dear Pastor Emanuel," she said, "is that all you can say to me?"

"My child," he replied, "you have made a good fight of it. Only a strong, and brave, and earnest soul could have gotten, unaided, as far on the road as you have. But if even you, after all your efforts, cry out for help from a divine arm, I am inclined to think it is a good proof that *there is*, somewhere, just the help you need. The thirsty earth sends up its cry to God, and the answering clouds send down abundant showers. Through all the wide range of this material universe no creature can be found with a want so strange, so apparently unnatural, so disproportioned to its seeming importance in the scale of being, but some beneficent law has been provided by which its cry may be answered. Whenever there is an organism which demands food, it is certain that food appropriate and timely is prepared for the organism. If you choose to put it in Mr. Darwin's fashion, that if there had been no supply, there could have been no organism, the argument is so much the stronger. It is still true that wherever there are eyes to say, Let there be light, light is; wherever there are fins, there is water; wherever there are wings, there is an atmosphere, which shall bear them fleetly and joyously onward in their restless course. So, when the soul of man cries out to know *more* of God, then his senses can ever teach him, it is certain, I think, that, somewhere,

God has made of himself that revelation; and that is why I call myself a Christian."

"Now," said Lucia, a little coolly, "you are going to ask me to believe that the world was made in six days; that Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stand still, and they obeyed him, and that the whale swallowed Jonah."

"No," he replied, serenely. "I am not even going to set you to decipher a cuneiform inscription, — perhaps you have done it already, — to learn that, however it was about the whale, Jonah *did* go to Nineveh, and did stir up a revival there. I am going to ask you to believe nothing, at present, which is not as fully proved as the history of Napoleon or Julius Cæsar. You may take up any history which you choose, and, provided only that it be worthy of the name of history, you shall find it admitted there that there once lived a man named Jesus, whom men called the Christ; that he was a soul exceptionally true and pure; that his life was without guile; that he claimed to come in fulfilment of prophecy, and to have a mission from God to the whole race of man; that this mission was simply, as stated by himself, to proclaim that God is Love; that he is our Father; that he calls us his children; that he would have us love him and love each other; that there is no other way in which men may be saved but by love; that love to God and love to man is the whole sum of human duty, the one only road by which men may rise out of this material, rudimental life to that spiritual existence wherein God is to be seen face to face; and that the performance of that duty is possible to man, because the Father loves us and pledges the whole of omnipotent strength to

our aid, so long and so fast as we call on them in the name of Love.

"I deny to no other religion whatever merit or virtue it can prove its claim to. The ancient Brahminism leads the mind to profound speculations concerning the nature of God and his relation to man; it proclaims, in a half-authoritative manner, and in language which is often wonderfully elevated and poetic, many doctrines which are found in the Hebrew Scriptures. It has clearer light on the subject of immortality than is found in the Old Testament. It gave originally very strong and elevated teachings on the subject of the unity of the divine Being; but there was no power in it to keep the people who made it their guide, true to the vital idea of one God, and it fell into decay. Buddha and Confucius, and especially Zoroaster, were great lights in the ancient firmament. They were powers ordained of God, I have no doubt, for the purification and uplifting of the people to whom they were sent; but not to them was given the word of life, the word of LOVE. I assert, without fear of contradiction, that you may search through all the interminable folios of the Rig Veda, the Zend Avesta, the four Kings and the five Shoos, and whatever other sacred books you choose, and you shall not find in all of them together so much that goes to the *saving of a man's soul* as is contained in the words, 'God is love,' 'Our Father, who art in heaven,' 'For God is your Father, and all ye are brethren,' and a half score of such simple, authoritative utterances from the New Testament as might be written on a half sheet of note paper."

"Pastor Emanuel," said Lucia, "why do you use the phrase 'to save one's soul'? I do not like it."

"I use it because I *do* like it. It expresses to me a grand and vital truth."

"I shall be frank with you, dear pastor," she replied. "What you have said about Christ impresses me deeply. It was like nectar to my thirsty soul when you told us, two Sundays ago, that, philosophically considered, creation must have sprung from love; that God is our Father in that truest sense, that he made us, and all things, for love's sake; and a Christ who comes to confirm the message is indeed a welcome friend and teacher; but there are still grave doubts left for you to solve; and first, since your language suggests it first, I ask, How can a God, who is love, doom any portion of his children, for any possible wrongdoing, to that eternal punishment which your Christ so surely taught? I can never believe that, dear pastor."

"My child, be not too sure. There are truths within truths. One thing is certain, both from science and revelation. In the long course of the ages, *whatever is unworthy perishes*. It is a fearful thought to us, who, as a race, live so much in that which is unworthy; but looking back over the skeleton-strewn plains of the mighty past, where lie the bleaching remains of whole tribes and orders of beings, who shall set bounds to the process of extermination? If souls there be — and I know not whether there be such — who can never, in the whole course of God's providence towards this race, thrill into new life at the call of divine love, can never pass out of the darkened crypts of selfish existence into the pure sunlight of love, these, it is clear to me, must perish."

"And this is the inner heart of the world-old dogma of regeneration — the new birth."

"The command of universal nature is, '*Go up higher.*' To whatsoever has not the power to obey this command, its doom is certain."

"My pastor, you preach fleeing from the wrath to come with a new vengeance."

"It is not I who preach it; it is God. The thunders of Sinai have never ceased to sound. Day by day, before our eyes, through all the walks of life, is spread the panorama of guilt and retribution; but through our Christ has come new, and glorious, and all-sufficient light upon the pathway. In Christ's picture of the judgment day, which by no means, to my mind, coincides with the day of one's death, but rather points to some period known only to God, when, in the course of nature, the affairs of each planet shall be duly terminated and settled, — a period to which even Science points a trembling and uncertain finger, — in that picture, I say, Christ makes the criterion of good or evil to be, not faith, nor doctrine, nor dogma, but simple loving. It is love which saves the soul, not in any arbitrary sense, but simply because it is love which ennobles, exalts, purifies, and makes holy. I tell you, my child, study human life and human development as you will, and you will find that as love is the only Creator, so love is the only Savior. There is, literally, no other name given under heaven among men by which we may be saved but the name of Love."

"But this is not Christianity, as the church teaches it. Do you believe in the church as of divine origin?"

"I do. Let me explain my belief to you in a figure. The utterances of Christ are simple, intuitive truths —

seed truths. It is as if Christ sowed corn on the hills of Judea. There arose, first, the tiny, tender shoot; but that was not corn. Then came the strong stalk and the expanding leaves; but these were not corn. Then followed the tassel and the budding ear; but these were not yet corn; but silently, in these later suns, the corn has been setting upon the ear, and the fierce heats are maturing it; and in these days I sometimes think the ravens of science and materialism are stripping off the husks, with strong beaks and angry cries, and by and by the blessed corn will be ground in all our mills and given to the people. And then we shall know what Christianity is. Then universal man shall know what it is, in reality, to love his neighbor as he loves himself. Then all public and private effort shall have for its end, not selfish good, but the good of all. Men shall dwell together in peace and unity, and Infinite Love shall look down from the heavens upon a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness."

Lucia looked up into the pastor's face with smiling eyes.

"You have not laid me down a stone to-day," she said; "you have built me a bridge."

"It is a plank, rather," he said, "which I have thrown across your gulf. Go home and build your bridge yourself. Try all your material by the law of love; that is your authority — there is no other. Whatever abides that test is good material, and you may safely use it. Use scientific tests in their proper places; but remember that the world had stood six thousand years, at the least calculation, and grown and prospered before ever science was heard of. Old Job said, long ago, '*I know* that my Vindicator liveth.'

The question is, *how* he knew it, when there was no learned professor of biology to teach it to him. 'Though he *slay* me, yet will I trust him.' Here was a good practical knowledge of God's providence, you see; the study of protoplasm under the microscope would not have greatly improved it. Don't be narrow, and condemn a thing because it stands in your way, or in the way of your theory. God's love is large enough to hold in loving concord all this universe, with its divergence, its clashing and clanging, and make harmony of it all. Why, Christianity took a thousand years just to impress upon the human soul that there was a future life. During that time it left numberless other things undone, but it crushed, and powdered, and pulverized the old materialistic ideas and institutions; and when the thousand years were over, Sadduceeism was dead and buried beyond hope of resurrection, and Christianity had a clear field to work in. Men call those the Dark Ages; but I think, to the eye of God, they shine with as bright a light as this boasted nineteenth century.

"It is in that large fashion that God works. Go home, dear child, and learn in his school. Let Christ be your teacher, and your lesson love, and tell me, when I see you again, if you have not found rest for your soul."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I AM weary withall this journeying and pleasure-taking; let us go home to dear old Ashland, and spend our summer there."

That was Marion's answer to her husband when he asked her what plans he should make for the coming season. So they went home to Ashland, and settled down to a quiet life. Marion arranged her house to please her fancy, and paid visits and received her friends. But through it all she still was 'weary.' Certain other symptoms gave Mr. Elms a secret uneasiness, but he conveyed no hint of his fears to Marion. With tender care and devotion he anticipated her every want; and through all those summer months Marion's life was like a dream of Eden. Toward autumn a great hope dawned upon her—a hope which rent her husband's heart, because he never dared to share it. Dr. Spear was sent for; but Science was utterly at fault. Only time could determine whether the signs indicated a rising or an ebbing tide—life coming or life departing. But the wise physician startled her soul by no such fear, and for some months she cherished the mother dream in all its purity, its sweet intensity of joy. And Chester outwardly rejoiced with her, and inwardly gave way to spasms of uncontrollable pain. Many a time, in the watches of the sleep-

less, fear-haunted night, he looked out to Lucia's darkened window, and thought there was no price which he would not pay for one hour of her sweet, unselfish, silent sympathy.

"She was strong enough and true enough," he said, "to have given me just the comfort that I need in this hour of trial; and yet it is better as it is. With God's help I will bear my pain alone."

When the frosts came and the air grew chill and wintry, Marion's bed was brought back into the drawing-room, and she was once more a prisoner upon it.

"Shall I not take her south again?" Mr. Elms had asked of the physician. But Dr. Spear shook his head.

"It is past that now. Home love and home care are best. Nature, aided by her strong will, and perhaps, also, — who knows? — by the providence of God, made one desperate throw, and won the game; but the effort was exhaustive. She has had her day, brief and bright; no earthly power can now do more than delay and soften the coming of *pallida Mors*, the messenger, whom, sooner or later, we all must meet."

It was a winter of deep and solemn sadness to Chester Elms; yet his cheerful philosophy never faltered. This sweet young life, which had ministered so much to his joy; this love, steady and intense, which had lighted in his home for so many years a flame as sacred as an altar-fire, were fading out of his reach. Neither the life nor the love would be dead; he knew that, but they would be gone from him; and well he knew the aching void which must of necessity be left behind. For love is the life-giver, and whenever the human heart misses a love which it has known, — be it of bird,

or child, or friend, or sweetheart, — a touch of blight and desolation falls upon the life.

When the knowledge of approaching death first dawned upon Marion, she was pierced through and through with an unspeakable anguish. It was not the fear of death, it was not solely the pain of parting, which transfixed her. Her nature was silent and deep; she seldom spoke her inmost thought, never gave voice to her inmost pang. So now she rallied all her forces in that secret place in her heart which was fully known to God alone, and made such a stand as she might against this overwhelming sorrow.

Chester knew well the meaning of her white face and fixed lips. But her silence could only be met with silence, and an unfailing love besides. But after some weeks had passed, and she had grown familiar with the future, she said to him, one day, —

“I wish that your little namesake had lived. I think he would have been a comfort to you when I am gone.”

Chester's face grew white then, but he said nothing, and she turned away, and seemed lost in thought. The months wore on, and Chester was aware that some sort of struggle was going on in his wife's mind, but what it was he could not guess. He conversed with her upon spiritual themes. She was clear and settled there. Years ago she had yielded obedience to what she believed to be the divine requirements; her peace had been made then, and it had never since been disturbed. Christ had paid her debt; the church had her in its steadfast keeping. She had no fears, not one.

She felt the winter's cold severely. While its un-

abated rigor lasted, her spirits seemed chilled — she was under a cloud. She watched the calendar with child-like eagerness, and marked the lengthening days with rapturous joy.

“I never gladdened so before,” she said, “in the returning sun. Open the blinds, and let in for me all the sunshine that you can. I shall not live, perhaps, to see him turn his face from me again.”

But the returning sun brought not back to her veins returning life. While the spring was advancing, her life was slowly ebbing; and still Chester knew that there was something in her heart that was unspoken, and he waited in silent suspense to hear what it might be. At length, one bright May day; she called him to her bedside, and looked up at him with a frank and open smile.

“Dear,” she said, “I have no longer anything to hide from you. You shall know it all. It is this: love has conquered, and I leave you free.”

“Marion!” he exclaimed.

“Hush!” she interrupted. “I will tell you all, and it must be as I say. I suppose, in the first five years of our married life, if I had been going to die, I should not have thought of such a thing as that you could ever marry again. But that was a childish faith.”

“Say, rather, an ideal faith, Marion.”

“Yes, an ideal faith, the faith of a dream. And when I learned” — she looked at him very steadily — “when I learned that it was *possible* for you to love another, I learned at the same time that your true will could conquer even that temptation, and so I loved you not less, but more. That you should be *consciously* and *determinedly* true, was something more, it

seemed to me, than that you should be held by the simple necessity of loving."

She paused a moment, as if struggling with one last impulse of concealment.

"Chester," she said, "do you remember the night you stood upon the wall under Mrs. Denney's balcony, and the conversation you held there with her?"

"Yes," he said, his face reddening.

"Well, I was awake; my window was open; the air was clear, and I heard and saw it all. I have known since then what you renounced for me. It was very noble of you, dear, and I have loved you since that night as I never did before. But for that knowledge I might never have persevered in my determination to be cured; nay, I think I should never have been cured; but you can see that it gave an added sting to the thought of death. At first it seemed to me that I could not give you up. You know with what tenacity I cling to *my own*. It is not altogether selfishness, or, if it is, it is selfishness mingled with a sense of justice. But suddenly, one day, as I was thinking it all over for the thousandth time, a voice seemed to say to me,—a voice, dear, that I am certain came from outside myself,—‘You claim him as yours, but you were only married *till death should part you*; after that your *right* ceases.’ I thought of that for an hour, nay, for many hours. The marriage law holds only for life. After death, what? Manifestly it must be, as our Savior says, that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven.

"I pondered weeks upon that text as only they can ponder who look upon the future as a swift-coming,

reality. I had an interest to know what it meant, and I thought, and prayed, and wondered, and at last the revelation came; and it was so sweet—just like a tiny shaft of heaven's own light sent down to cheer my dying hours.

"O, Chester, I know now what the joy of heaven is. It is its unselfishness, its large, true lovingness. Dear Chester, it glows in my soul this moment for you, for all. This heavenly love is inclusive, and not exclusive. It needs no law to bind it, for it is a law unto itself. It denies to the dear object of its love nothing, but revels in every added bliss. So, Chester dear, from my inmost soul I tell you that so long as you may live, whatever makes you happy will make me happy too; whatever you rejoice in, I, looking down from heaven, shall rejoice in also. And never have one doubting thought about the future, because in that dear heaven to which I go, and where you will one day meet me, *there is love enough for all.*"

He was sobbing upon her bosom, and she held him there, her eyes suffused with tears, but the very light of heaven shining in their clear and placid depths.

"So, Chester," she said, smiling with something of her old archness, as he lifted his face to kiss her, "keep my memory sacred for a year and a day. After that, God make you happy, and grant you all the desires of your heart."

CHAPTER XXX.

PASTOR EMANUEL'S Christianity was largely of the practical sort, and a nature so active and buoyant as Lucia's could not long resist the contagion of his benevolence. The matron of Christ's Hospital was a dependant of the family of the pastor, — whose true title, Lucia had long ago learned, was Baron Von Erlach. She was a woman fifty years of age, of warm heart, sound judgment, and great experience. In Frau Elmendorf Lucia found a sincere friend and an excellent director and adviser in all charitable schemes. From this source, also, she learned some details of the pastor's previous history. Descended from one of the old historic families of the kingdom, democracy was still in his veins, and when an early disappointment led him to adopt a celibate life, he had devoted himself to the people. The ancient building now occupied by Christ's Hospital had been a town residence belonging to the family, but grown old and out of date, Pastor Emanuel had given it up to his beneficiaries, and contented himself with humbler lodgings in a more convenient quarter of the town. He had a place at court, indeed, but it was a sinecure, and his only object in retaining it was, that it afforded him access to the government, when measures pertaining to his favorite theories and pursuits were under advisement. In this capacity he

was a valued friend of royalty, though his eccentricities of mind and conduct prevented public recognition of the fact. In one of their casual interviews, the pastor said to Lucia, —

“Why do you not avail yourself of your residence with Dr. Schroeder to obtain some close insight into the mysteries of science. The doctor is a famous magician with the microscope; and if you can find access to the sunny side of his nature, — as I don’t doubt you have done long ere this, — and get him to give you a course of lessons in histology, it would be something to benefit you all your lifetime. Now don’t neglect this suggestion.”

“You may be sure I will not,” said Lucia; “and I thank you, besides, for making it. I am sure that Irma and Ursula will join me in the request, and we shall make a holiday labor of it.”

“Under Dr. Schroeder,” he said, “I know that you will be thorough, as far as you go; and, besides, I have a slight acknowledgment to make. I have learned, by studying your mind, that a mere smattering of knowledge is positively not as injurious to women — that is, sensible women — as to men. Nature has wisely gifted your sex with a versatility of mind, and capacity for rapid and intuitive generalization, which enable you to make small stores available beyond the power of man. Will you, therefore, kindly pardon those little faults of scepticism, which, I fear, marred our earlier interviews?”

“Oh,” she said, laughing, “there can be no pardon where there was never an offence. I make no pretensions to learning, and I felt confident that you would acquit me of shallowness and insincerity, so your witti-

cisms never wounded me. If they had, I owe you too much upon other grounds even to remember things so minute."

But neither charity nor microscopic lore could wholly divert Lucia from the fascinations of the studio. Her lessons in moulding were regularly attended, and one after another, and with varying degrees of success, she had made copies of the best heads in the studio, and after that, had executed portrait busts of Dr. Schroeder and the young ladies. At last, sitting before her board one day in an idle mood, with just one gray film of homesickness shadowing the otherwise azure sky of her contentment, the thought struck her to try her skill upon a head which memory pictured very clearly to her mind. It was a good subject for the sculptor's art; the high, firm head, the grand and simple contour of the features, were just suited to the marble, and she wrought patiently at it, with a curious wonder the while at the accuracy of her own memory. She spent much time and all her store of art upon this head, and gradually it assumed the very expression which pleased her. Firm and simple, strong and true, it stood before her; and what of shifting curves about the mouth, and merry glimmer in the eye, the immobile clay refused to render, her fancy could fully supply. She wrought over it for weeks, brought herself at last into that morbid state where nothing pleases, and then put it away out of her sight.

Adolph had watched her closely, but, for some reason that she failed to penetrate, he never offered suggestions or advice. She was just as well pleased, for she desired that this should be her work alone; and, besides, she had of late occasionally met glances of Adolph's eyes

which did not please her. He was not a man of whom she could ever make even a friend, although a certain sort of good fellowship was very possible between them ; but beyond this frank and loyal companionship of the studio, there was no ground of assimilation. Once or twice she had thought it necessary to mark this distinction by her manner, and always Adolph had understood her, and retired to the proper distance ; but he had a passionate, headstrong nature, never broken to any curb, and after a time Lucia learned to make her visits to the studio either in company with Frau Schroeder or during Adolph's absence.

It was a day in the early spring. A heavy rain-storm marked the breaking up of winter, and Lucia, looking out upon the drenched earth, and gray, and weeping skies, felt a burden of sadness upon her spirit. Adolph had been absent all day ; and wrapping a shawl about her, she climbed the steep stairs to the studio, not with any intention of working, but because the southern window, which lighted her own peculiar corner of the apartment, gave her a prospect beyond the town of valleys already growing green, and blue mountain-ranges, which always pleased her eye. To-day clouds hung low upon the mountain-sides, but here and there a snowy peak broke through its veiling mists, and looked like some great island of the upper air, where spirits might rest upon aerial voyages, and the rolling, shifting masses of the clouds, as they broke up before a light and warm south wind, and trooped off northward, added to the unreal and phantasmagoric aspect of the scene. Presently the high, bright sun sent a shaft of yellow light to disperse the ashen shadows, and then peak after peak of the distant mountains began to

gleam, and glisten, and glow with promise of coming brightness, and the white glaciers took up the refrain, and shimmered and shone from afar in the sunlight, and the quick, bright verdure of the valleys laughed with joy, and all the air was tremulous with the radiant presence of the spring.

Lucia gladdened in her heart, but with the gladness came a thought of home. Who would put the spade into her garden beds these April days? who would train the vines upon her trellises? Who would uncover her pinks, and let in the sunlight upon their winter's night? Would Chester, for her sake? or were his home-cares all-absorbing now? Had he altogether forgotten her? It might be, and yet she was placidly sceptical. He had said, "I shall not forget;" and in that last interview on the day before she had sailed, his voice had been very firm and sincere when he had said, "Whatever pain or change may come between, *you and I* are changeless and true."

She arose then from the window where she had been sitting, and uncovering the bust of him which she had made, sat down before it and contemplated it. No, it did not do him justice. She could see now wherein she had failed to bring out in full expression the manly strength, the ideal purity and transparency of his nature. "I have not genius," she said; "it is not within my power to do it. After all my labor, the bust is nothing worth. But thank God, I have that within my heart which needs no aid from the outward vision."

She folded her arms, and leaned upon the beard before which she sat. Deeper than every other sorrow in her heart lay the thought of her boy, her Chester. "If God had spared me him," she said, "I would

never have murmured. If he could have grown up under the direction of that noble and true soul, what might he not have been to both of us?" But that was all changed; that brief, bright dream that looked so firm and sure, had vanished like a bubble, a vision of the air. She could give up her friend, if it were God's will; but nothing, *nothing* could ever reconcile her to the loss of her child. That shaft could never be withdrawn. That wound could *never* heal. Tears forced themselves to her eyes, and bowing her head upon the senseless clay before her, she wept in silent anguish.

So absorbed was she in her grief that she did not hear the door open, nor Adolph enter. Her first external consciousness was of firm footsteps as he approached and stood beside her. She looked up, and, seeing him, arose. His face was livid with passion; he held a mallet in his hand, and raising it high in air, with one blow he demolished her poor bust, and sent its shivering fragments clattering against the wall.

She bowed with dignity, and without a word started to leave the room. There was but one door, and rushing ahead of her, he placed his broad back against it.

"No, madam," he said, "you cannot leave me just now. I have somewhat to say to you."

"Say on," she said; "I listen."

"I know your secret," he exclaimed, almost fiercely. "I have known it all along. Do you think I did not watch you all the long days that you were working at that bust? Your face told me the whole story. That man lives; you love him, and he despises you."

"Your conclusions," she said, coolly, "are, as such passionate and hasty conclusions are apt to be, half true, half false. The original of that bust lives, and is

my true and steadfast friend. The tears you found upon my face were not shed for him, but for my child. Circumstances brought the memory of them both up together. For the one I shed no tears, for the other I wept. I make this explanation, not because you have a right to demand it, but out of regard for you, as a member of a family to whom I am under infinite obligations, and whom I entirely respect. Will you allow me to pass?"

He stood immovable, his eyes silently fixed upon her.

"You have not been wholly frank," he said. "I study faces. I cannot be mistaken in their language. There is that between that man and you which no one knows but your two souls, and you did not part with him because it was your will."

The sneer was masked, and she need not have noticed it if she had not chosen. But she did choose it.

"You intimate," she said, "that if I have loved a man unsought, there is shame in the confession — shame, and possibly something worse. I choose to meet that sneer, and to tell you, as a revelation out of my deepest consciousness, that when God gives it to any soul *to love*, he gives his last, best gift. If that soul trifle with and profane the gift, the fact is damning. No blushes can convey the shame of it; but kept pure, and sweet, and true, it is a crown of glory; it is a draught of living waters, a sure patent of immortality. I do not sigh, I do not weep, still less do I blush or hang my head because I love; but before men and angels, ay, before you, I stand proudly, and thank God that, having found that which was strong, and pure, and true, there was that in me which unhesitatingly recognized and did it loyal homage."

"You are a strange woman," he said ; "but you are the one woman of all the world to me. Do you see this paper which I hold ? It is a commission from the king's own hand. It assures my fortune. I have moved heaven and earth to get it, because with that in my possession I should dare to face you, and tell you that I am worthy to love you, to offer you my hand, and heart, and life. They told me below that you were here, and I came up the stairs glad at heart to meet you here. What found I ? You, indeed, but bowed weeping over the bust of one who, I knew before, had won your heart before ever you saw me. But I loved you so, I doubted not that I could compel you by devotion to forget him. I know this man ; his head has told me all. He has not genius, breadth, enthusiasm, as I have. He is not even strong in passion. His love is a steady flame ; it does not seethe, and rage, and burn, as mine does. Why, you are more impetuous than he, and you can be marble if you choose. I thought I had power to make you forget, and I built a hope upon that fact. But in one mad moment I offended you past all hope of forgiveness. I have built an air castle that was fair to look upon, and might, perhaps, — I know not, — have foreshadowed a reality, but I have dashed it in pieces with my own hand."

"Adolph," she said, gently, "that you broke my bust is no unpardonable offence. I am still so much your friend that I would gladly help you to allay this storm of passion which my poor presence has raised, if you will permit me. It is true that I do not love you as you have desired ; but it is just as true, I believe, that in no deep or vital sense do you love me. Such rages and gusts of passion are not new to you, I fancy. More-

over, they do not spring from love, but rather from self-love."

"Ah," he said, with bitter vehemence, "you taunt me with my past follies. I deserve it, and will not wince, but I tell you truly that heretofore love has been to me a mere affair of the senses. It is you who have taught me what the love of soul may be."

"The love of the soul," she said, "is tranquil, and strong, and pure. Such heats and flashes of passion as that which made you shiver my poor bust to-day, soon burn themselves out, soon rage themselves to exhaustion."

"Lucia," he said, calm now, and deeply in earnest; "sit down here and talk to me for a moment. There is something which you know, and I do not. Will you impart to me the secret of it?"

"It is very simple," she said. "I only know that truly to love is to forget one's self, and be lost in something higher than one's self. Have you ever loved in that fashion?"

"You could teach me to love you in that way," he said.

"It does not come by lesson-giving," she answered.

"But I see it, as you talk to me. O, Lucia, must I give you up? you, who might make of my wayward nature whatever gentle, law-abiding thing you pleased?"

"If you truly love me," she said, "even my going away from you across the seas—and it must come to that soon, you know—will not leave you alone. What there is in me that does you good will be with you still."

He buried his face in his hands, and sat silent for a moment.

"I see it," he said; "but I shall never attain unto it without you."

After a moment more he added, —

"Tell me — will you tell me? Will you trust me so far — about this friend of yours? What is the power in him which keeps you so true and steadfast? Won't you tell me so much? I want to know it."

"First, that he is true and steadfast himself; then, that his nature is pure to transparency."

"How," he said, looking up to her incredulously. "You speak of a man who is pure to transparency. In what sense do you mean that?"

"In a strictly literal sense. He is pure; as a gem is pure, whose inmost depth is revealed to your gaze. You have seen a ruby, perhaps, a great, blood-red gem, perfect in form, rich in color, but holding in its heart a murky shadow. Priceless, if it were pure; as it is, cheap."

"And a man can be to *your* pure gaze true and transparent like that?"

"Yes."

"And you are not a woman to be easily deceived. I should not dare to tell you a falsehood."

"In this case, at least, I know that I am not deceived."

"You put strength, and grasp, and force into that head. Is it in him?"

"In greater measure than I have expressed it."

"Lucia, can you reproduce that bust?"

"Yes; I mean to do it. I saw to-day wherein I had failed before. I shall improve upon the old model."

"Go about it at once. I want to cut that head. It shall be my penance. You have not the power to ex-

press this soul which you have described to me, but I can do it. It shall be the proof to you, that at least I can comprehend virtue."

The next morning she did commence it, and the two wrought pleasantly together upon the task. When the model was finished, Adolph set himself steadily about the work in marble. It was small, a mere mantel ornament, but it was finished with the best skill of the artist. There was an antique Roman strength about the head, a more than classic purity in the expression, and the lips curved with a tenderness that was like life itself. It was finished the very week she was to leave Germany.

"I will keep the clay model," Adolph said, when he placed it in her hand, "to remind me of you; and will you not let the marble head be my witness that knowing you has restored to me my lost faith in love, and purity, and virtue?"

"I shall keep it as long as I live," she said; "and it will scarcely be dearer to me for the sake of the original, than for your sake."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I CANNOT consent that you should leave us," said Pastor Emanuel to Lucia, one day, as the time of her departure approached, "without seeing my mother and my home. You must know our mountains before you judge us altogether. Frau Elmendorf will pay my mother a visit soon, and I hope you will consent to accompany her."

Frau Elmendorf cordially seconded the invitation, and Lucia was delighted to accept it.

"You, who see only this nether side of my life," continued the pastor, "cannot imagine how busy a man I am. It will not be possible for me to escort you, as I should be glad to do; but it has been a habit of mine, for years, to spend Whitsun week upon my estates, and I shall certainly join you then."

As the castle Von Erlach lay on the direct road to Italy, which was Lucia's next destination, she bade a final farewell to her kind friends, the Schroeders, before setting out upon her journey with Frau Elmendorf. They travelled by post, and in less than twenty-four hours found themselves deposited at the little inn, where they were met by the heavy, lumbering coach from the castle. It was late at night, and Lucia could form very little idea of the new region into which she

had been ushered. She was regretting this to Frau Elmendorf, when the latter replied,—

“And I was congratulating myself that it was so. You will now obtain your first view of our mountains from the castle terrace, and in the early morning, which I am sure is precisely what Von Erlach would desire. We have the promise of a fine day, and I hope to hear you say that our home view surpasses even your expectations.”

The castle, Lucia judged, as they rumbled into its great, dim court-yard, under the still stars, was an ancient structure, slightly modernized, indeed, for convenience, but with great care to preserve the antique simplicity of its style. As she entered the wide portal, the massive stone-work all about her gave her a chill and prison-like feeling; but when she was shown into the cosy reception-room, where she was presented to the Baroness Von Erlach, a room embellished with sombre but rich tapestries, and hung with pictures and book-cases, and lighted by a bright mountain fire, she was at home at once.

Her hostess was a simple German woman, with something of the dignity of an ancient name about her, yet full of sweetness and good-humor. She gave Lucia a warm welcome as the friend of her son and of Frau Elmendorf.

“You will find us mountaineers a simple folk,” she said; “but if I read your face right, that will not altogether displease you; and the mountains themselves—well, we will show them to you in the morning.”

It was said with a simple grace and a smile so like Von Erlach’s own, that Lucia felt that she had found a friend. She slept soundly, but the first ray of the rising

sun awoke her. She dressed quickly, sure of finding Frau Elmendorf awake; and the two went down together to the breakfast parlor. Their hostess entered soon after, and, giving them a cordial greeting, opened a glass door, and invited them out upon the terrace.

The sky was clear, and the morning mists were rolling up the mountain-side, disclosing to Lucia such a scene as her eyes had never rested upon before. Below the plateau upon which the castle was built, lay a green valley, which held a shimmering lakelet in the distance; but all the background of the landscape was filled with reaches of shaggy forest and towering mountain peaks, receding into the blue distance, crested here and there with snow, and glowing in the morning light like giants clad in some celestial armor. Villages were clustered thickly upon the nearer hills; far off among the pines the white walls of a convent gleamed, and up and up and up the rough declivities, till they seemed mere birds' nests built on inaccessible crags, her eye discerned the huts of foresters, the cottages of herdsmen and dairy-maids, and, as here and there a patch of verdure glistened in the sun, she traced out troops of well-fed kine cropping the sweet, rich grass.

"It is sublime!" said Lucia, "a perfect wonder-world. I shall never cease to thank Baron Von' Erlach for bringing me here, nor you, dear madam, for your kind welcome."

Lucia spent a week delightfully in making acquaintance with the mountains and the mountain folk. Frau Elmendorf was her guide, and a wonderfully intelligent one she proved to be, for she not only introduced Lucia to the externals of mountain life, but brought her to the very homes and firesides of the people. She

took her also to the church — made her acquainted with the priest, and opened up to her view the whole machinery of sacerdotal power and influence. Lucia learned more in that week of the real nature, designs, and possible accomplishments of the Romish hierarchy than she had dreamed in all her life before.

At the end of the week Pastor Emanuel arrived. Lucia saw at once, by the rapture of his home-coming, that in the world of cities and courts he led an exile's life.

"You can scarcely imagine," he said to her, "the blessing it is to me to breathe the clear mountain air again; to greet my mother; to gather the mountaineers about me and acquaint myself of their welfare. I love the spot; I would never leave it if I did not feel that my absence serves these people, ay, and many more besides, better than anything which I could do here."

Von Erlach became now her guide, and some bright hours of every morning they spent in mountain rambles. If she wearied, they sat down beside a clear spring, and the pastor, taking from his wallet a bit of bread and cheese, they lunched together, talking the while, till she was rested, and then, taking up again their alpenstocks, they fared their onward way.

One morning he said to her, "I must bring you to-day to the Eagle's Nest. Ten years ago my mother climbed to the spot. I never knew another woman to attempt it. But you are strong of nerve and sure of foot, and I dare to trust you."

The Eagle's Nest was a wild and lonely crag, originally inaccessible, except to the most daring hunters, since it was to be reached by means of certain

curious devices of locomotion known only to those whom toil or recreation lead to the heart of nature's craziest scenes. Once, in his youth, Von Erlach had been carried to the spot by a robust huntsman, and, enchanted by the view, he had spent great toil and pains to make the road more practicable. His best efforts, however, only succeeded in reducing the actual impossibilities of travel; and the place was still so out of reach that few gentlemen tourists attempted it.

"You must have come of mountain stock," said Von Erlach, as he buckled a belt about Lucia's waist, and gave into her hand a well-sharpened alpenstock. "You have the true mountain intrepidity and steadiness of nerve. I feel akin to you this moment, by virtue of those traits. There! now you are my captive. This strap, which is fastened to your belt, will never leave my hand once during the ascent. If you stumble you cannot fall. If the abyss conspire against you, it must conspire against me as well; and I defy it."

It was a good two hours' scramble, but they reached the crag at length; and, wearied as she was, Lucia could not repress her exclamations of delight. Far, far below them lay the castle — a mere speck upon the mountain side; the lakelet in the valley glimmered like a blue gem set upon a green, winding ribbon. All the busy industry of human life had faded out of the faint and mist-clothed distance; and around them, near and far, for a space that seemed absolutely limitless, the everlasting mountains towered; their solemn pines, their gleaming glaciers, their foaming torrents, and silver waterfalls, with wonderful lights and shadows shifting in curious interplay and change over all, — making up a panorama which dazzled Lucia's imagination, and

sent the wing of her soaring fancy home to her own bosom to rest.

"When God speaks in such a fashion as this," she said, "only the *soul* can answer. It is a place for holy thoughts. Compared to this scene the vanities of the outward life are flimsier than the morning exhalations of these valleys. The soul abjures them, and stands in unclothed majesty in the presence of its God."

They were silent for a moment, and then he led her to a lichen-covered rock, which had been hewn into the semblance of a seat, and said, —

"You must sit here for a half hour and rest before you attempt the descent. Meantime, there are some things I want to say to you. This may be our last talk together for years, perhaps forever. I do not despair of visiting America, but it will be long before I can attain to that pleasure. My hands and heart are pre-occupied now with grave matters. The times are full of portent; all Europe heaves like a volcano with smothered, smouldering fire, that must sooner or later break forth. Even these solemn, peaceful mountains are invaded with the spirit. In yonder all but impassable glen is a secret meeting-place of *L'Internationale*. Our peasants, our artisans, the very hunters and woodcutters have all drank of that witches' broth, and no man can tell what hellish spell it may work in their veins. There is only one spirit abroad which can cope with its magic, and that is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of Love. God will take care of his own, I know, but I watch the process with a fearful intensity of interest. There is only one key to the mystery. As love is the central, vital principle upon which this universe is built, so also it is the moving law of all human progress.

Nothing is stable, nothing immortal, which is not subservient to the grand beneficence of the Creator, the permanent, imperishable welfare of the human soul. Viewed in this light, I know that all caste, prescription, rank, must perish off the face of the earth. It is well; I do not cling to them; nay, I would gladly relinquish every acre of soil, every title-deed to any rank or privilege whatever, this hour, if that could avail anything towards the universal freedom. As it is, I hold these things in trust, and God knows my life is given, its days and nights, without reserve, to the work of clearing away the obstacles which hinder the free course of immutable and unchangeable love.

“And I want to send you back to America with that thought vital in your soul. There is yet work to be done there. America has not reached the pinnacle of even national freedom. Nay, the republicanism of Europe strikes its root far deeper to-day than the foundations of your American institutions. You have qualified monarchism, truly; but you have not uprooted it. There is no denying it—the question which the next century has to meet, is,—state it as you will,—at the bottom, Communism. The word strikes a terror to the heart; and the idea will work itself out in a method still more terrible if shallow or selfish counsels prevail. The Christian church—or whatsoever power stands for Christ, for love—has a fearful responsibility in the work. Love is the true leveller, and if its methods prevail, all will be well; but if the work must be done by hatred, proscription, force, the world will hardly bear the shock. Let, therefore, every man and woman range themselves according to their convictions. There are two forces in the field—Re-

ligion and Science — which ought to clasp hands together upon the right side. Instead, they, forsooth, have not yet outgrown quarrelling. It is neither religious nor scientific to fight. It is both religious and scientific to grow. Ignorance and selfishness build the only hell there is in the universe. For the deliverance of mankind from these ogres, Science and Religion are arrayed. But Religion inculcates Faith, while Science canonizes Doubt; and so, because their methods differ, they must fall to, like raw school-boys, and pummel each other's heads. It is as if the centripetal and centrifugal forces of nature should fall out with each other. Now, this quarrel must be harmonized before the world can be saved; nay, before the questions of the next half century can reach a peaceable solution. And, as in every other quarrel, both must yield — Religion, something of its dogmatism; Science, something of its arrogance. The one must no longer teach more than it knows; and the other must cease maintaining, that, because a thing cannot at this moment be proved by its methods, therefore it is not true. Both will stand upon a higher plane for the renunciation. Religion shall inculcate a purer faith; Science shall widen the circle of its investigations, and, hand-in-hand, they shall proclaim the knowledge and the love of God.

"By the way," he continued, "you have never told me what was the result of your lessons with Dr. Schroeder."

"Oh, it was delightful," she replied. "I do not see how scientists, of all men, can be sceptical about God. Why, I know now that the very hairs of my head are all numbered, for I have examined them and found finger-touch of God upon every one."

He smiled. "I like that answer," he said; "for now I am persuaded that neither materialism, nor spiritualism, nor clairvoyance, nor mesmerism, nor electricity, nor protoplasm, nor evolution, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That rock is the Christian's impregnable fortress. If once I can see you planted firmly there, I shall have no further fears for you. Do not mistake my meaning in regard to Science. I would by no means have you neglect it. It is the twin sister of Religion. The one is the right hand, and the other the left, of all true progress. But true Science is large, and calm, and starry-eyed — not narrow, bigoted, and vindictive. Judge all things whatsoever by the law of love, and you cannot go astray. And may God bless and keep you, my child, and make you in your own way and your true sphere a blessing and a benefit to the land to which you go."

They started then to return. Their conversation on the homeward road I shall not repeat; but it brought them nearer to each other than they had ever been before, and Lucia went to her room with her eyes full of tears, and her heart overflowing with gratitude.

"Dear Madam Bernstein was right," she said; "I did come abroad for a purpose. Her promise is all fulfilled, except in one particular, and that, alas! is impossible. The loss of my child can never be made up to me; that is a wound that will never heal."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE feast of Pentecost is one which Catholics and Lutherans alike observe with decorations of green branches, and garlands, and flowers, in the church and in the home. There was great stir of rejoicing in castle and town. Pentecost lilies blossomed in the guest-chamber, and the baking of Pentecost cakes made a clamor of joy in all kitchens, which echoed even in the castle drawing-room.

"The birth of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit," said Pastor Emanuel, "are the two events in church history which I always commemorate; the first for its intrinsic value, the second because it memorializes a truth which men are far too ready to forget. It is no truer now, I suppose, than it always has been, that

'The Age culls simples,
With a broad clown's back turned broadly to the glory
of the stars;'

but I often feel ready to forgive the church its indiscriminate vituperation against sin, when I see how materialism, in its protean forms, blunts human perception and stupefies the heart; how prone men are to regard this world as self-existent, — a great machine wound up and going on of itself, — and to deny, the divine agency in every turn of its wheels.

So, year by year, I pray with deeper earnestness for the continued and increasing descent of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, to uplift our hearts, to draw us more and more, by the cords of divine love, to that open communion with God which alone can clear up the mysteries of being, and enable us to run intelligently the great race of human progress."

"I wish you would tell me," said Lucia, "what you think of the Catholic church. The more I see of its workings and hear of its doctrines, the more it interests and confounds me."

"The Catholic church represents to me one of those ways of God which are higher — rather let us say deeper — than our ways. I deny neither the glory nor the shame of its past; still less do I pretend to prophesy its future. Above all, I do not share in the abhorrence of it which many Protestants profess. The hard, compact stalk of the corn must grow and keep its greenness until the grain is fully ripe. Then it will wither of itself. So, in the not very far future, I think the grand diffusive powers of the doctrine of peace and good-will will have wrought such a change in the moral atmosphere of the world, that bigotry and despotism will die out for want of air to breathe; and then, it seems to me, the grand, catholic truths of universal brotherhood, of the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the life everlasting, will shine forth with renewed glory. God only knows how all these conflicting elements of human life will finally sum up; but he does know, and he will bring the fiat of the everlasting love to pass."

The festivities of the day were over at length, and in the quiet eventide Lucia walked forth alone to a

favorite spot within the castle boundaries. It was a jutting point of rock, which overhung the valley, and commanded a view of the sunset. The vesper bells were ringing when she reached the moss-grown seat, and in the roads which threaded the valley and wound up and down the mountain-sides she could see groups of peasants strolling, with green branches in their hats. A boat was crossing the lake, and the clear silver tones of a flute came softly to her ears playing the *Ave Maria*, and a chorus of full voices took up the refrain, and made the hills echo and re-echo to the strain. From the mountain-sides came the tinkle of the cow bells and the jodel of the herd-boy, and soon lights would begin to twinkle out from the dairy huts, and Lucia smilingly imagined the little comedies which would be enacted in those mountain cottages, for on Sunday night the dairy-maid coyly receives her lover from the woodman's hut or from the farm below.

As Lucia sat in the calm, declining afternoon, entering more or less vividly into the life of this hard-handed peasantry about her, a deep seriousness began to tinge her musings. Why were the toiling millions, all over this broad, fair land of Europe, left to bear such heavy burdens? and what was the meaning of this frenzied cry which was beginning to make itself heard with such vehemence? Pastor Emanuel's allusion to the International recurred to her, and she shuddered and grew sick at heart as she thought of the mighty coming conflict which his words portended.

Then suddenly — she could never tell how — the gates of vision swung open before her. Clouds and darkness rolled away, and in their stead shone an ineffable bright light, and a voice spoke to her inme

soul, "All souls *are* equal; have equal rights to this broad, fair earth, and all the common heritage of man. If some are incapable, who made them so? Not themselves; God. If some are inharmonious, who made them so? Not themselves, surely; they are the product of law. If some are vicious, who made them so? Conditions; and conditions are antecedent to birth, and no human being is responsible for the circumstances under which he came into being. Well, then, this great communistic movement is a grand force starting up through the providence of God — through the sure operation of his laws also — to assert, in grim, harsh accents, this great truth. It forces the rough, rude side of a principle upon the human mind in order that finer and more intuitive souls may take up the problem, and go on with it, working it out to perfect and harmonious conclusions."

Then, by that inner vision which can never be described, she saw that in the not far future results would be wrought out to astonish mankind. She saw the downfall of all the old selfish theories of property, — that what a man can grasp and hold, is his; that when a man has no power to assert his rights, he, practically, has no rights, — the upbuilding of governments upon a broad, unselfish foundation of mutual forbearance and love. In God's eyes the rights of the weak are the sacreddest of all rights, as we hold the rights of the helpless child more sacred than those of the grown man. God's helpless ones are the poor, blind, incompetent, vicious victims of their own irregular and blighted conditions. God cares for them. The mind that was in Christ Jesus, the mind of Him who was **born**, and lived, and died, not only *for*, but *with*, the

poor, the outcast, the degraded,—*that* was the mind of God towards humanity. *That mind still rules the world.* That throbbing, pulsating heart of love is the fountain from which the life of all things flows. That eye will never slumber nor sleep; that arm will never be folded to rest till all the lowest, the weakest, the most helpless are brought to the full measure of the inheritance of the sons and daughters of God; and to do this the institutions of mankind must be renovated and made true. Christ is a Savior, a Redeemer, through the agency of that great love which made itself manifest in the flesh, on purpose to get nearer to humanity, to make it possible for humanity to get near to him. Then she saw, in a manner more glorious than any she had ever heard or dreamed before, the *oneness* of Christ with God. In that moment of ecstatic vision she could not even say that Christ was the Son of God. It was God speaking through a human soul to all lost, sinful, suffering ones, and pointing a way whereby they might be saved. And by the agency of this constantly inflowing and renovating love, she saw how true it is that “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it *together.*” In the accomplishment of this purpose shall be found the promised millennium.

Language failed utterly before the glory of this vision. Her heart ached, and her brain reeled with the fullness of it.

“Ah,” she said, “the days of God are a thousand

years, and in far less than that time it shall *all* be accomplished."

"You have asked to find your own soul," said the voice. "Behold! I show you **THE SOUL OF ALL THINGS.**"

The vision faded; the tide of rapture ebbed; the dusk was gathering about her; but she sat there still, contemplating the great truths which the Spirit had shown her. It was plain to her in that moment that the universe lies in the bosom of God, as a child in the arms of its mother; that because it is of God, by the divine union of spirit with matter, there is no wrong in it, which, in the long course of the ages, shall not be righted by the inherent power of the eternal love. In her own mind she put the principle to a practical test. Are governments despotic? Love shall bid them be equal, and just, and true. Is the church bigoted? Love shall finally beat down all dogma, all arbitrary rule, and men shall learn that one is your Father, even God, and *all* ye are brethren. Is the family built up on selfish principles? Love, and not self-love, shall one day reign; and when the truth shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. Are the relations of Labor and Capital inharmonious? The blessed dawn of co-operation and brotherly love shall solve that knotty problem. Does intemperance desolate the land? Vituperation shall cease, and love shall give the child a healthy organization, and remove temptation, and so the evil be stayed. Does licentiousness scourge the nation? Ah, one word tells all the cure there is for that vice, and it is **LOVE.**

So, through the whole category of human crimes and follies, wherever righteousness, justice, temperance,

and truth are needed, the fountain of them all is in the perennial stream which flows from the bosom of God, to gladden and make fruitful the whole earth.

Men talk of religions, but to Lucia's eye, in that moment, the word can no more be plural than the word God can be plural. There is one God; there is one Christ; there is one religion, for that religion is co-extensive with God, and includes all possible good. Whatever permanently benefits mankind springs out of Love, and love is all of God, and Christ is its manifestation to the world. This was that blessed "Word, who was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

And we talk of losses — of lost friends, lost children. Oh, how her heart bounded to feel that nothing is lost, but all is found in God! Had her boy been taken from her arms? Not death itself could wrest him from the arms of God, the love of Christ; he was there safe, found, forever and forever hers.

In that shower of tears her ecstasy dissolved itself, and she grew placid and human again.

"Ah," she said, amid her tears, "though a pagan, he was still inspired who wrote, —

‘ For Thy love is the only love,
O Thou who ownest all.’ ”

The convent bells were ringing for the *Angelus*. She lingered for a moment to listen to them. The echoes died away upon the still evening air, and then the world was at rest. Silence brooded over all, and the stars kept watch above.

Suddenly there fell a strange sound on her ear—a single bell. She knew the tone of it; not silver-clear, like the convent bells, but solemn and heavy in its reverberations; the bell of the Ashland meeting-house. It tolled a knell, prolonged and deep, and at the end, in the old Puritan fashion, it counted the age. While she wondered, a soft voice whispered on the evening breeze, clear and joyous, —

“I am gone forever, like the first of the dawns.”

The voice thrilled her through and through. What solemn message had that line from the old Hindoo poet for her soul?

She wrapped her plaid about her, and hurried to the castle. On the terrace she met Pastor Emanuel, and glided past him in silence. Her heart and brain were both too full for speech this evening. On the morrow she would, perhaps, be calm enough to tell him how, on this Pentecostal day, the Holy Spirit had visited her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"WHEN shall I welcome you to America?" said Lucia to the Baron Von Erlach, on the morning of her departure.

"Ah, that I cannot tell," was his reply; "but you may rest assured that it will be at the earliest possible moment. Still, I may be delayed many months, for when one is earnestly devoted to the common weal, private pleasure must wait on public business. However, it must be, I think, within the year."

The promise made the parting joyful, yet still it was with many regrets that Lucia bade farewell to South Germany. Aside from its treasures of art and nature, aside from the hearty hospitality which she had experienced, circumstances had made it hallowed ground; but a tie still stronger stretched from her heart to her native shores, and there were hours when it seemed to her that a hand was pulling at the cord in a manner that would have been painful but for the secret thrill of joy with which such memories always stirred her.

She lingered out the summer months on the shores of the Mediterranean, but the early autumn found her *en route* for home. In the golden prime of October she landed in New York. Her friends in Brooklyn gave her a warm welcome, and it was immediately arranged that, for the present, she should

home with them. Mr. Schroeder rented a more commodious dwelling, in an upper story of which a suit of rooms was fitted up for Lucia's exclusive occupancy. For several weeks she was busy with these arrangements; but when at last the carpets were down, and the new furniture put in place, her pictures hung, and her books and flowers all adjusted to her liking, and she settled down to regular living, she began to feel a nameless unrest and longing. Just then it happened that her rent in Ashland became due, and she was obliged to write a business letter to Mr. Collins. It was her first communication with Ashland, direct or indirect, for a year and a half, and as she sealed and addressed the letter, there came over her a deep and almost painful desire to know what might have happened there in that time. "In three days," she said to herself, "I ought to have the answer. What *will* it tell me?" But the third day came, and brought her no reply. It was evening, and, a little sad at heart, she was sitting by her window, looking out upon the sunset, which was lighting up the city beyond the river with its wonderful molten glow, and cresting with gold the rippling waters of the bay. There was a ring at the door bell, but she did not heed it. Her door stood open, and presently she heard a foot upon the stair which made her heart beat. Quick, elastic, taking two stairs at a bound, it was a footstep not to be mistaken. She looked up, and her visitor stood in the doorway.

"Chester!" she exclaimed, without rising from her chair.

"Yes, Lucia, I have come. Are you not glad to see me?"

"Yes, serenely glad."

She was thinking for whom that bell was ringing which she had heard in the Bavarian mountains.

"And not at all tumultuously glad?"

She had risen, and offered him her hand.

"Sit down," she said. "You have surprised me, so that I am forgetting the proprieties. I need not ask for your health, since, now as always, your face speaks for you; but have you come to New York alone, and did you know that I was here?"

"Yes, Lucia, I am alone."

He spoke solemnly, and she felt his meaning.

"It was for Marion, then, that the bell was tolling on that Whitsuntide."

"You heard it?" he asked.

"Yes; it came to me across the sea, with these words: 'I am gone forever, like the first of the dawns!'"

He looked still more amazed.

"Those were the last words she ever said; Lucia, are you telling me the truth?"

"The simple truth," she said.

"She must have come to you in the hour that she died!"

He was silent for a moment, and then added, —

"And I have come to you, Lucia, for comfort; to lay all my sadness on your friendly bosom, and find rest. You, of all the women I ever knew, are capable of comforting me — and asking nothing in return. I have come to seek this grace at your hands."

She had been a little cold till now, but once before she had truly said that they never needed to be explained to each other. In that moment she understood him perfectly.

"O, Chester," she said, "you always call for the best there is in me. That is the magic which you alone, of all the world, possess. You shall have your comfort, and there shall be no tax upon it, either."

"Ah," he said, drawing a low seat to her side, and holding her hand in his; "it is worth while to have come all the way from Ashland for this."

They talked of the old home for a little while, and of the changes which had come there, and then of Chester's grave.

"Dear friend," she said, "I think you will be glad to know that I am comforted; that even for that loss God has made me ample amends; that joy, beyond all earthly love or blessing, has been, and still is, mine. I cannot tell you all about it now. It will require days of long and quiet conversation, but at least I may tell you that your prayers for me have not been in vain."

Mr. Elms remained a week in New York, and they were daily together. For hours he sat in her pleasant parlor, and listened to animated recitals of her adventures abroad. Again they went sight-seeing together, as happy as two children in the appreciation of all beautiful things, and music and the drama yielded them once more their divinest charms.

It was a week of deep peace and contentment to Lucia, and yet there were hours when she could but feel that her friend was changed; hours when the sweet serenity and unconsciousness which had characterized him of old, gave place to a more restless spirit. Now and then, too, there were rays in his eyes which she had never seen there before; and the result was, that she began quietly to put up some defences, which heretofore had not been needed. He felt this change

in their relations also, without at first thoroughly comprehending it.

It was the last day of the visit, and the irrepressible unrest which had haunted him at intervals was more than ever apparent in his manner. As he was pacing restlessly up and down the room, his eye suddenly caught a gleam of marble from behind the books upon a shelf of the book-case. He went to it, and, drawing forth a hidden bust, held it in his hand, and looked at it curiously, with growing amazement. It was a representation of features which seemed familiar to him.

She turned crimson as he looked at it, but said nothing.

"Why, what is this?" he asked, at length.

"A bust of the Emperor Hadrian," she replied, coolly. "I bought it of a Jew at Rome."

He looked at her penetratingly, a half smile upon his lip.

"Lucia," he said, "there used to be only truth and sincerity between us. I cannot believe that you have changed."

"No," she said, "I have not changed. It is simply that while in some respects it is easier, in others, with my impetuous frankness it is not as easy, for me as for you, to walk the straight paths which you have marked out. I will tell you all about that bust — some other day."

He smiled radiantly then.

"You shall keep your little mystery intact, much as I want to know it," he said, "for the sake of those words — 'some other day.' Come here."

He sat down, and she went and stood beside him.

Two days before, as they had been walking down

Broadway together, a jeweller's window, in which was a rare display of gems, had attracted them, and Mr. Elms had proposed that they should go in and renounce the pomps and vanities. Looking over the show-cases, and commenting with the utmost freedom and unconcern upon the wares displayed, Lucia had admired a mediæval cross, of black enamel, brightened with a tracery of gold, and set in the centre with a solitary brilliant. It was a simple ornament, but chaste, and just suited to Lucia's fancy, and she had thought that some time when she was alone she should return and purchase it. But now, as she stood beside him, she was surprised to see a little packet in his hand. He opened it, and took out the cross, which was attached to a slender chain of gold, and hung it about her neck.

"That is to keep you in mind of me," he said; "and now I am going."

"And when shall I see you again?"

He looked at her steadily, and smiled.

"At Whitsuntide, surely," he said; "perhaps sooner."

She looked lugubrious, but would not complain.

"You have been a tender and sweet friend to me," he said. "You have your faults — I shall always maintain that; but take you all in all, I do believe the round world does not hold another woman so disinterested and so true. Now, will you let me go?"

It was a cheerful countenance for which he waited. She smiled upon him radiantly, and said, "Good bye."

And then, with a bright look in his eyes, and one lingering pressure of the hand, he left her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN Lucia found herself left alone, she experienced a momentary sinking of heart; but very soon, plucking up courage, she said to herself, "Shall I, who have kept heart and faith in the face of so many trials, give way to melancholy now? God forbid." And with her usual buoyancy, she began straightway to arrange schemes for her winter's occupation.

"'The poor ye have always with you.' That is a blessed thing," she said, "for hearts oppressed with nameless sorrows." And she made plans of beneficence, feeling all the time how blessed it was to be working with Christ for the salvation of the world. More and more she saw, as she interested herself practically in the state of the poor, that very much of sin and crime springs from the *conditions* by which human life is surrounded. It is the work of love by every possible means to ameliorate these conditions. And as Lucia labored and thought, it seemed to her that she could see, in the not very far future, a time when the state even, shall become so impressed with the spirit of Christ, that it shall bend all its energies to the work of lifting up, educating, purifying its poor and degraded children, and so save itself the hard duty of confining them in jails and penitentiaries.

But practical work was not all that she needed to

keep her heart pure and her brain healthy. More and more a longing grew within her to learn the history of the Christ idea. She took her Bible, and, beginning with the life of Abraham, read all the wonderful story of the Jewish nation; how it was founded in one family by a principle of intelligent selection as wise and discriminating as the most advanced scientist of to-day could devise. In Abraham appeared a variation upon the spiritual characteristics of the human stock in the direction of *faith*, and the peculiarity was deepened and intensified by marriages made with infinite care and pains for three generations, and the foundation of the world's religion was laid deep in that principle which is the ruling power of Old Testament history — faith in God. She saw how the Jewish nation was held together, as never a nation before or since has been, by the simple bond of faith in one God, and a belief in his revealed purpose to manifest himself for the salvation of the race. She pondered deeply over the problem of why it should happen that all the monotheistic religion of the world should trace back to that one man, Abraham, who claimed to have received it by revelation. Philosophers in that ancient time truly proclaimed God, as philosophers of to-day proclaim him, as a simple abstraction; one, indeed, because that which has no form cannot be divided; but this was not the monotheism of the Jewish nation, proclaimed by Abraham, and re-asserted from age to age, always with a claim of divine authority, and always with the promise of a future revelation in the person of a Christ — by Moses and the prophets. That such a claim and such a prophecy should have been made with a force sufficient to hold together for

three thousand years a nation who could have been so bound by no other tie, was in itself a marvel. But when to that marvel is added the appearance, in the direct line of prophecy, of a teacher claiming to be that inspired Christ for whom the nation waited, announcing, in reality, as the condition of spiritual regeneration, the vital principle upon which all creation and progressive development depend, and this with a force and comprehension which attracted all the best influences of the age, and crystallized them into a religion which has borne the test of time as no other religion ever did, human reason stands challenged to a vast labor if it would overthrow the claim.

That myths and superstitions have from the earliest times clustered about the pure revelation, is no more than might be expected from the imaginative and philosophic tendencies of the human mind, and the incapacity of the finite to comprehend the infinite, except by slow processes and infinitesimal degrees. Yet all history attests the growing, life-giving properties of the Christian faith. There are those, it is true, who deny to Christianity any controlling influence over the civilization to which its name is attached, but the mark upon it is undeniable, and cannot be erased. No other civilization in the whole history of the world has been evolved upon the vital principle of love, as is the civilization of to-day. Catholicity, beneficence, universal brotherhood—these are the watchwords of the age, and they all stand identified with the history of Christianity. Mankind itself is a word unknown to ante-Christian nations, because the idea of human brotherhood was then unconceived.

To the church she turned her wistful gaze. The City of Churches was her home, and she made the round of them in the hope of finding a congenial spiritual abiding-place, certain that if it could not be found here, it could nowhere be found. She listened to their preaching, she informed herself of their doctrines and terms of communion. In the so-called liberal churches she too often found a soulless philosophy enshrined in the place of the Christ she loved, and her heart was offended by studied allusions to Jesus of Nazareth; while in those churches which made the loudest professions of faith in, and love for, the divine Master, she often found narrowness, exclusiveness, bigotry, and always a stumbling-block in the shape of a creed, placed at the very door of the sanctuary.

She went home from church one day disheartened by her futile efforts to find the rest she so much needed. She sat down by her window, hopeless, hungry, longing, and lifted up her heart to the Shepherd of the fold in a pitiful cry for help.

The Spirit heard and answered, and the joy of that communion found expression in this hymn:—

MY SHEPHERD.

I walk my darkened way alone;
The light that on my pathway shone
In other days is dimmed and gone—
But thou, O Christ, art mine!

Thy presence comforts, soothes, and cheers,
Thy loving hand dries all my tears,
Thy smile dispels my darkest fears,
For thou, O Christ, art mine!

So, though I walk my way alone,
So, though no shepherd's care I own,
My trusting heart shall make no moan,
Since thou, O Christ, art mine !

Where thou hast placed me, thou wilt keep ;
Thy love is high, thy love is deep ;
The SHEPHERD knoweth all his sheep,
And thou, O Christ, art mine !

Oh, let my feet no longer rove,
But fold me in thy perfect love ;
And when I reach thy courts above,
Thou'lt own me, Christ, as thine !

But it was not in Lucia's temperament to feel herself excluded from the church which called itself by the name of her divine Master, without a thorough survey of the reasons of that exclusion. She set herself to study church history. She traced out a theological professor, a man with all the weapons of dogmatism in his armory, and plied him with questions. And these were the conclusions which she reached :—

The dogmas of the church were settled in times which had not half the light of this age ; in times whose methods and conclusions in every other branch of intellectual investigation have long since been overthrown in the courts of reason. Say what one pleases, the educing of a philosophical system from simple facts and annunciations of primitive truths, is a purely intellectual process ; and is it fit or wise that the men of to-day, with the experience of the last fifteen hundred years in their treasury, should yield the meed of superiority in intellectual force and acumen to

the men who lived in the latter days of the Roman empire?

Should we not rather, taking the admitted facts of Christ's life and teaching for our measure, apply it anew to the needs and emergencies of the race, and find out how by means of it we may most wisely and comprehensively build the institutions of the future? "Go ye into all the world," is a command which applies to more than geographical distances. It is the mission of the church to take captive the world, not upon the outskirts of civilization so much as in the strongholds of its power. Now as never before the world is opening wide its gates, and going out to seek for catholicity, beneficence, a genuine, practical, loving kindness. The vital question of the hour is, Shall the church meet this quest by holding up the living, loving Christ, or shall it proffer a stone? Shall it combine its forces, and devote itself rationally and whole soulfully to the work of building up a true, spiritual life, a genuine, hearty love for, and faith in, God and all mankind, or shall each sect spend its best energies in defining its differences from every other sect, and building up the barriers of pride and exclusiveness?

The spirit of Christ is abroad in the world outside of the churches. When a sect of so-called heathen philosophers, like the Brahmo Somaj of India, forms a constitution which embodies language like the following, it is a plain indication that the divine Providence is outstripping the slow progress of the churches in the work of Christianizing the world. Says the Brahmo Somaj, —

"No created object shall be worshipped here.

"No man, or inferior being, or material object, shall be worshipped here as identical with God, or like unto God, or as any incarnation of God, and no hymn or hymns shall be offered or chanted unto or in the name of any one except God.

"No carved or painted image, no external symbol, which has been or may hereafter be used by any sect for the purpose of worship, or in remembrance of any particular event, shall be preserved here.

"No created being or object that has been or may hereafter be worshipped by any sect shall be ridiculed or contemned in the course of the divine service to be conducted here.

"No book shall be acknowledged or regarded as the infallible word of God. Yet no book which has been or may hereafter be acknowledged to be infallible, shall be ridiculed or contemned.

"No sect shall be vilified, ridiculed, or hated."

One sees here a strong reaction against idol-worship, a tender jealousy for the divine idea which is necessary to a church just emerging from a nation sunk for centuries in the depths of idolatry; but one sees also that this people have unconsciously, but most really and effectively, planted themselves upon the Christ idea. What plainer or more touching expression of love to God and love to man do the most advanced creeds of Christendom offer?

Truly, the hour cometh when neither place nor sect shall claim the exclusive worship of the Father; but wherever is found a loving heart, there shall be recognized a temple of the most high God, a holy place.

And it cannot come an hour too soon. India, and

China, and Japan, and the islands of the sea, are stretching their arms to Christendom for the bread of life. Shall we send them stalks and husks, or pure grain? Creeds and dogmas, or the simple gospel of love?

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. ELMS's experience during the first three weeks after his return to Ashland decided him not to visit New York again for the present. He had been all his lifetime learning the force of Descartes' rule, to seek for happiness in limiting one's desires, rather than by striving for self-gratification; and he soon found that if he was to keep faith with the dead, and have any peace of his life for the next few months, he must avoid temptation. Letters now and then, simple, friendly greetings, brightened the winter; but in May it happened that business called Mr. Elms to New York unexpectedly, and, thinking to take Lucia by surprise, he gave her no warning. He went with a cheerful heart. Indeed, this opening spring had been to him a cheerful season, and many bright plans for the summer were floating through his brain.

On arriving at New York he called first upon his sister. Presently, Isabel Brevoort came running in to welcome him, and, as she said, to impart the latest news.

"Unless you have had a hint beforehand," she said, "you will never guess it, though it concerns one of your friends; indeed, I think, poor Marion used to imagine, a very dear friend."

This bit of polished malice rankled a little; but Mr. J

Elms was, nevertheless, quite serene in his demeanor. He did not think anything could have happened to Lucia to dismay him very greatly. Still, he was curious.

"Indeed," he said, "I cannot imagine how any dear friend of mine can have come within the range of your observation. Pray don't count upon whetting my curiosity any farther, but proceed with your information."

"Well," she said, condescendingly, secure in ultimate triumph, "you must know that there has recently arrived in this country a German nobleman, Baron Von Erlach. He comes ostensibly upon some private mission for his government; papa thinks, I believe, that it is about emigration or *L'Internationale*; something about the working classes, at any rate, though nobody seems to know exactly what. Of course he is duly lionized, and at a very select dinner party, the other day, where the guests were mainly from the inner circles of diplomacy, three foreign legations being represented, it was my good fortune to meet him. You'll wonder how *I* got there; but imagine my amazement when I found there as well — whom do you imagine?"

"Mrs. Denney, I suppose, from your manner. I know that the Baron Von Erlach is her friend."

"Her friend, indeed! Why, they are betrothed. It seems she made the conquest while she was abroad. I heard some gentlemen congratulating him upon his approaching marriage, and he was just as radiant as only those odious Germans can be under such circumstances."

“‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I have passed a life of bachelor misery only to find happiness when my hair is gray.’”

Mr. Elms began to grow a little cold about the heart.

“You are quite certain,” he said, “that there is no mistake?”

“Indeed, there was no room left for any possible mistake. Mrs. Denney’s face literally beamed. It was as effulgent as the rising sun. She fairly hung upon his lips. It seems he is eccentric, and has some sort of half-clerical position among the poor at home. Can you imagine her addressing him across the dinner-table as ‘dear Pastor Emanuel’?”

Mr. Elms smiled a wan smile. He *could* imagine it.

Mrs. Brevoort rattled on.

“The baron is in Washington now. He is to return in a week or two, and then they are to be married. Little Lucia Denney a baroness; think of it.”

“I confess,” said Mr. Elms, coolly, “that for Lucia Denney to be a baroness is not to me so surprising as that a baroness should be Lucia Denney.”

“You absurd creature,” said Mrs. Brevoort, radiant with delight at the misery she was causing. “Well, she is welcome to be a baroness, so she does not seek to obtrude her upstart head in this family.”

“Isabel,” said Mr. Elms, “that is quite enough. When you forget yourself in that manner, it is time I should take my leave. In fact, I ought to be down town this moment, and must bid you a good morning.”

Mr. Elms transacted his business as speedily as possible, and went home. He did not feel that he could see Lucia just then. He must have a little time in which to face his fate, and grow familiar with its lines.

ments. He had a hard week's struggle. There came a mild and rosy evening, in which he stood under the spreading elm which shaded her garden. Leaning against the bittersweet wall, he went back, in fancy, to that June twilight, when, standing there, she had poured forth the impetuous avowal of her love, and he had held her, for one moment, sobbing in his arms.

"Was I wrong?" he said. "Have I exacted more of her and of myself than human nature can bear?"

He paused, thinking.

"No," he said, at length; "though I lose her, and, losing her, lose all that makes life sweet or dear, still I would not purchase the happiness of a lifetime at a price so great. I have truth and honor left, and her image in my heart — the image of a woman unsullied and pure as the snow-drifts. I can look both God and man frankly in the face, and in that consciousness, I have my reward. It is enough."

Did he blame her? Ah, no; he loved her too tenderly for that. For the first time, it is true, there seemed to be something in her conduct which he did not fully understand; but thinking it over, hour after hour, he said, —

"It is the old story of a heart caught at the rebound. When she went abroad, she left me happy in the enjoyment of Marion's restored health; her heart was sore and troubled. She herself has told me how she found comfort through the ministry of Pastor Emanuel. Of course, he fell in love with her, — how could he help it? — and when he followed her across the sea, it was not strange that she should have accepted him. It was not rank, position, wealth, I know that; it was a true, manly, Christian heart to which she gave herself.

Well, if God so wills, who am I, that I should complain ? ”

He sat down then, and wrote her this letter.

“ MY DEAR LUCIA : It is now a week since I returned from New York, having heard there of your engagement to the Baron Von Erlach. It has taken me these seven days to bring myself into the proper mood for congratulations ; but believe me, dear Lucia, in that time I have learned anew the blessedness of unselfish loving—a lesson which, indeed, I thought I had learned before ; and now I can, and do, congratulate you with all my soul. The past can never be effaced from my heart, nor, as I believe, from yours. There is a sense in which you are my Lucia still, and always will be. Death itself cannot wring from me those bright blessings of faithful love and trust which you have bestowed upon me in the past ; and if it be not God’s will that you should ever be wholly mine, as I have sometimes dreamed you might, I can relinquish you to one more worthy,—and I have not forgotten your enthusiasm about your dear Pastor Emanuel,—if not without a pang, at least with manifold blessings and the most heartfelt wishes for your future joy.

“ God bless you, Lucia. Never, so long as I live, shall I cease to pray for you, my sweetest, truest, most unselfish friend. Once more, God bless you, and make you as happy as you deserve, or as my heart can wish.

Your true friend,

CHESTER ELMS.”

It was evening when Lucia received the letter. She

read it with mingled tears and smiles. Sitting down to her writing-desk, she wrote in reply, —

“MY DEAR MR. ELMS: Your letter is received. It goes to my heart to send back congratulations so exquisitely conceived and so eloquently expressed. But what can I do? The Baron Von Erlach is to be married next week to his old love and our dear friend, Madam Bernstein. It was an affair of their youth, to be happily consummated, we trust, in their ripe and beautiful maturity. You can imagine what joy it is to me to have been the instrument of bringing them together once more. If it seems strange to you that they should not before have been in communication, I can only say that, she having been betrothed at the time of their first meeting, the affair was never known to any one outside of her immediate family; and at her wish also it has been kept a profound secret until his arrival.

“The wedding will be strictly private; but Madam Bernstein desires me to say that it would give her great pleasure to make you acquainted with her future husband.

Your friend,

LUCIA.

“P. S. How *could* you come to town without paying me a visit? Did you not deserve a twinge or two?”

As Lucia posted her letter, she heard the bells of the cathedral ringing, and said to herself, with a smile, *To-morrow will be Whitsunday.*

Three days later, Lucia, who had counted the hours,

sat impatiently at her window. The bell rang, and again she heard the joyous bound of his foot upon the stair. She rose and opened the door, and the next instant felt herself clasped in a warm and strong embrace.

“My sweet and glorious one!” he murmured.

He stooped to kiss her, but she raised her eyes to him with a merry glance of inquiry.

He read her thought instantly, and exclaimed,—

“I love you, dear, I love you.”

And again she was clasped in that strong, triumphant embrace.

Madam Bernstein's wedding was the scene of double congratulations, and it was hard to tell which were happiest, the married pair, or those who were only betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. ELMS passed a busy summer. The old house had been burned a few months after Marion's death. The site of it was smoothed away, and a tree planted on the spot where Marion's bed had stood so long. Chester had now to build a new mansion upon a site which pleased him better than the old one. Lucia's house was still rented, but she passed the summer in Ashland, and in the autumn they were married. But marriage was not to either of them the full consummation of their desires.

All through the following summer the world seemed very fair to Chester Elms, and life approached its meridian glory. To his heart it was very plain that to make marriage a means of selfish pleasure only, is to stultify and profane it. Life must be a going out of one's self, a going forward and upward, or it fails of its chief culmination and joy. Dearly as he loved his wife, a pure, unselfish life had taught him that there was something better for them both than simple mutual interchange of caresses and endearments.

It was in the golden month of October, the month of the Holy Angels, that Lucia approached that trial which brings to the heart of every woman, even the bravest and most loving, a thrill of fear and apprehension. The hours of her anguish were long and bitter,

and Chester stood, with blanched face, by her bedside, and prayed God for her life out of an agony such as he had never known before. But it was over at length; and the cry of a little child smote his heart with a rapture nameless and inexpressible. The crown of fatherhood was on his brow, and he felt himself, in that moment, every inch a king.

He kissed the mother, and held her hand in his, in silent, unspeakable joy. And she, looking up, pale, but joyful, from her pillow, said, —

“You might bury me now, Chester, and I would make no sign, for I have lived to give you a pleasure which you never experienced before. Now you know what manhood means.”

“I do not propose to bury you quite yet,” he said, laughing; “I have other plans for you.” And then he added, more soberly, “Your whole life, Lucia, since I first knew you, has been to me a pleasure unique and incomparable; but in this moment all joy finds its culmination. I do not any longer thank God for you, except as I thank him for my own being, since it seems to me they are one and inseparable. To live without you now, is to me an inconceivable idea.”

They brought then the tiny bundle, and laid it on the mother’s arm; and he, parting the flannels, stooped down and kissed the pink and dimpled face.

“She shall be called Aurora,” he said. “Marion was my Dawn, but you are my Day.”

The curtain is down; the lights grow dim; but amid the fading glamour, one last word.

I have told you my story — the story of “a simple woman who believes in love.” Before we part — wh

knows whether ever to meet again? — let me add **this** benediction —

God's blessing rest on all true souls, who, looking through the husks of error, can perceive within, the priceless kernel of truth; who, piercing the **mistaken** deed of the erring, can discern the hidden **aspiration** towards unselfishness; who can see in the **strivings** of every human heart, not less than in this whole creation which groaneth together, the quickening throes of that immortal principle, which, in the glorious hereafter, shall reconcile all antagonisms between mind and matter, faith and reason, soul and self, and thread the universe through with that unspeakable harmony and restfulness which even nature foreshadows as the ultimate fruition of the divine, eternal love.

